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FROM SIAM TO  
SUEZ.   \*   \*   \*



By JAMES SAXON CHILDERS

FROM SIAM TO SUEZ  
THROUGH ORIENTAL GATES  
THE BOOKSHOP MYSTERY  
HILLTOP IN THE RAIN  
LAUREL AND STRAW  
THE UNEDUCATED POETS  
PROSE TALES OF MOTHER GOOSE  
ROBERT McALPINE: A BIOGRAPHY





THE MAD PRIEST OF ANGKOR AND THE AUTHOR

*N.B. The author is on the right.*

# FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

By JAMES SAXON CHILDERS



DECORATED BY  
WILLARD BONTE

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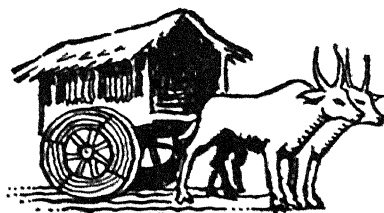
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

*To*

ROBERT C. TURNER  
OF SHANGHAI, CHINA,  
WHOM I MET ONE DAY AND  
HAVE LOVED EVER SINCE







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## I

AND so, Mac, old boy, I'm writing you this letter to share my gloom.

Do you remember that gracious Greek, Nico Zographos, and how he served us our first night in Deauville? Remember how we heard "*Neuf à la banque*" until finally Zographos dealt the financial coup de grâce, and we went away from the table with shriveled pockets? And do you remember the year the bookmakers banqueted at our expense after Sergeant Murphy beat Shaun Spadah in the Grand National? And do you recall a certain trip we made third class from Monte Carlo back to our rooms at Oxford, because of an absolute famine of fives, seventeens, and thirty-twos on the Monte Carlo wheels?

Those experiences were trying, but trivial when compared to what happened to-day; for to-day I went from Hongkong to Macao, the Portuguese colony in China, and lost every cent I had. And while in France and England, one is among friends; in Macao, one is just around the corner from the sewers of hell.

Macao, as you know, is called the Monte Carlo of the Orient. It does exist almost solely on gambling, but in other ways it is not like Monte Carlo; it is ragged, dirty, and smelly. In the town are twelve

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

tawdry fan-tan dives, heaven only knows how many opium houses, and not even heaven has a record of all the brothels.

The ground floor of the Yeng-Hang gambling house, where I went to run my thousand dollars to a fund large enough to finance me around the rest of the world, is given over to coolies and to the riffraff that swarm in and out of the place. In the balconies sit cleaner and wealthier persons. Portuguese ladies. Tourists. Lordly Chinese gentlemen in silks softly sibilant. Delicate little Chinese girls who gamble all day, and at the beginning of night go back to houses of strange practices. I sat between an elderly Chinese gentleman and a Portuguese lady, looking down at the *foki*, the croupier, a half-naked fellow, stupid, with rolls of fat at his belly and rolls of fat at his throat, whose eyelids never lifted. The other attendants, too, were drowsy with opium. I knew I could win at fan-tan from a lot of sleepy Chinamen.

Before the *foki* at one end of the table a bowl is placed over a small mound of *cash*, old-fashioned Chinese coins with holes in the centers. After all bets have been made, the *foki* lifts the bowl and counts the coins—four and four and four and four, until the last four or any part thereof is left. Bets are made on the number of coins remaining after the count is finished. In the balcony one bets by giving the money to an attendant who puts it in a basket and lowers it to the *foki*.

For a time I played a combination bet called *faan*,

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but I lost at faan, so I tried *nim*, then *kwok*, then *Ching*. For an hour I listened to the sing-song call of the attendants as they lowered the basket and placed the bets, to the drone of the foki as he counted the coins—four and four and four and four—and I heard the quick, excited chirps of the toy women about me, and the clamor of the coolies announcing the winning number long before the foki had ended his count. At the end of an hour I left the gambling house and walked about the city, humming a bit, whistling a bit, swearing considerably. I refused to buy lottery tickets from a degenerate looking European in a green shirt. I refused offers of rickshaw boys to guide me to houses of unnatural exhibitions. I stopped in front of a tea shop and listened to a Chinese girl sing her little songs of sadness, and there I watched wealthy Chinese merchants smoke opium and dream heavy-lidded dreams of Ningpo, and Yunnan, and Wei-Hai-wei. Finally I went down to the waterfront and asked about the steamer fare back to Hongkong. I had seven cents more than enough. I gave them to an old beggar woman. She mumbled something to me.

"She prays that the Christian gods and all the other gods will bless you," a man interpreted.

"Some of them will need do something about it," I said.

Back in Hongkong, I cabled my father, humbly. Just ten months ago I left Alabama for no reason except that I was thirty years old and hadn't seen the Orient. Besides, I was tired of my two jobs: writing

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

a daily newspaper column and teaching English literature to college sophomores. I started out to wander around the world. I've been through Japan, Korea, Manchuria to the Siberian border, and south through the rest of China. When I left home, my father assured me that five thousand dollars was not enough to take me around the world. I was certain he was mistaken, and told him so. He can now have the pleasure of smiling at my ignorance, though the smile will be an expensive one, for I cabled for a heavy loan.

The money should arrive to-morrow morning. In the afternoon I'll sail for Saigon in Indo-China, and from there set out through the jungle to hazard the mystery in stone that men call the ruins of Angkor.

## II

**D**EAR OCTAVUS ROY COHEN: You asked me to write to you about the ruins of Angkor. I'm sorry you did; for I've been in Angkor a week, yet can find out nothing about it. At night I prowl through the temple and in the day I ride elephants through the town, but the stones are only stones and I hear nothing.

In Athens I can see Socrates in his ragged old coat, forever talking, forever making his soul as good as possible. In Rome I hear the tramp of the legions and Cato shout, "*Delenda est.*" In Paris I see Villon staggering, staggering just a little as he searches for the snows of yesteryear. In the streets of London, Doctor Johnson shambles along with Boswell at his side. I hear him say: "Sir, when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life." But Angkor is silent. The lips of the four-faced god are mute; even the spirit of his devotees has gone into the awful jungle.

I would not have you feel that Angkor prompted me to ask Cleopatra's famous question: "Is this the mighty ocean? Is this all?" In a way, I have not been disappointed in Angkor, but the place has not set me on fire; I have not felt as I did when looking at the Great Wall of China, or at the Parthenon, or at the Forum: Genghis Khan never stormed these gates,

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

Phidias never worshiped in this temple, Cæsar never walked these streets. . . .

I arrived at Angkor after a week's visit to Saigon, the real capital of Indo-China, a French city set in a jungle. The French own Saigon: they dominate it; one sees the native only as a servant, or as a soldier in the *troupes coloniales*. The architecture of Saigon is French. The paved boulevards are French. The big shops are French. There is a Hôtel de Ville, a Théâtre Municipal, a Musée, a Jardin Botanique. Saigon in its buildings, parks, and streets is definitely a counterpart of Paris, but the buildings are merely masquerade; even a transient detects a noxious decadence in the lives of the haggard officers of the Foreign Legion, of the white-faced government employees, of the red-faced rubber planters—Frenchmen forced to live in daily contact with the jungle and its diseases, the heat and its diseases, the sullen hatred of the natives, opium, the nostalgic realization of exile, and the insidious enervation of the Orient.

After a week's visit in Saigon—seven days of ghastly heat and of torment from mosquitoes, seven nights of tennis and absinthe frappés, of late dinners and champagnes and brandies, of visits to opium houses and to other houses where depravity in its most vicious form is commonplace—I was glad to hire an automobile for the two-hundred-mile ride over the jungle road to the ruins of Angkor.

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

Three times he spoke his name and three times I tried to repeat it. He laughed as I stumbled through the confusion of syllables, and when at last I called him Rollo, he didn't seem to object. He was a white-haired old man of eighty-four years, and his entire international vocabulary was this: "Angkor Thom," "Angkor Vat" (pronounced Anglor Wot), "Buddha," "Vishnu," "soldat," "le roi," "madame le roi," "Naga," and "all right." For a week we talked with each other daily, and we used no other words than these. A stranger might have been puzzled had he seen us in conversation, for he might not have comprehended the gestures of our arms, the contortions of our bodies, and the significant grimaces by which we discussed history, art, and curious practices.

I found Rollo late one afternoon squatting on his haunches, chewing betel nut, and spitting the blood-red juice upon the stone causeway that leads to the temple of Angkor.

"You speak English?" I asked.

Rollo stood, bowed to me, raised his arm and swept it before him, encompassing by his gesture the entire façade of the mighty temple.

"Angkor Vat," he said.

"Yes, I know, but do you speak English, and could you tell me where I could find a guide?"

Again the inclusive gesture and again: "Angkor Vat?"

"Good, but you speak French *peut-être?* *Oui?* *Vous parlez français?*"

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

But the habit was on him: once more I learned that at the distant limit of the great arc described by his hand stood the temple of Angkor.

"Righto, old chap." I nodded and smiled to him. "*Merci bien.*"

I started along the causeway. Rollo trotted beside me, his little wooden clogs tap-tapping upon the stones.

"Where are you going?" I demanded.

"Angk—"

"So I gather, but why are you following me?"

He looked at me and smiled. Absurdly enough I thought of wrinkled copper.

"All right," he said, and startled me by his linguistic versatility. He struck his chest, touched my arm, and, clasping his hands, showed that we were friends. Afterward he pointed ahead at the temple. Crouching low, peering all about him, he stood on tiptoe, gazing with keenest interest. Finally, with two forefingers ever moving one before the other, he signaled our advance.

"But, see here, you don't speak any language I understand. How can you—"

Already he was tap-tapping toward the temple. I could only follow. And so, led by this venerable Cambodian, this graybearded ancient of infinite gentleness, of wisdom to leap the barrier of language, I began a tour of architectural wonders wrought more than a thousand years ago.

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

Cambodia is a kingdom in French Indo-China, and in the center of Cambodia are the famous ruins of Angkor, once capital of the most powerful nation of Asia. Angkor was built by a people called the Khmers—whence they came nobody knows, where they went nobody knows, but at one time more than a million men lived in Angkor; and its grandeur shamed the Rome of Augustus, the Athens of Pericles, and the Babylon of Nebuchadrezzar. To-day there is nothing except the shell of the mighty city and a silent temple of infinite majesty—a city and a temple, gray stone ghosts in a jungle of green.

Some writers have declared that the Khmers were driven from their capital after a war in which their enemies combined against them. Others believe the Khmers were blotted out by a swift plague. French scholars who have spent years studying the ruins and their inscriptions contend that in the fourteenth century the slaves of Angkor suddenly fell upon their masters and destroyed them. Chaos followed. Gradually the slaves reverted to savagery, and gradually the savages degenerated into the decayed peoples who live their shabby lives near the ruins to-day.

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“Angkor Vat,” said Rollo, pausing at the entrance of the famous temple, then leading me into the outer corridor. “Vishnu,” he said, pointing at a giant figure with hundreds of arms. Upon the wall was an unbroken bas-relief depicting wars, battles, and fearful

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

exploits of wondrous men. "Soldats," Rollo explained.

"And a bloodthirsty lot—eh, Rollo?"

"Soldats," he answered, solemnly.

We turned a corner and the subject of the bas-relief changed to tortures used by the Khmers. One man's eyes were being plucked out by vultures. Another writhed between two stones that were slowly pushed together. A third was hacked in pieces with great axes. One miserable wretch was surrounded by a number of ladies who cut tidbits from his body.

Whenever we arrived opposite a particularly gruesome carving, Rollo demonstrated. I shall always remember his graphic depiction of a disemboweled man whose entrails were used as a skipping rope—Rollo danced about with the happy abandon of a child whirling a daisy chain. In the middle of his *danse macabre* I caught his little white jacket and pulled at it, stopping him. He bowed, and, hurrying past the other torture scenes, led me around the great square, more than a mile in length.

Angkor was built with gray sandstone that takes a polish almost like marble. In the middle of the twelfth century when the temple was built by the architect Visvakarman, thousands of tons of this stone were brought in huge blocks from quarries nineteen miles away. The outer gallery and inner gallery are connected by a stone causeway thirty-six feet wide. In the center of the temple are five huge domes, the mid-

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

dle one thrusting its rude splendor six hundred feet into the air. The walls, columns, entablatures, and pilasters are all marvelously decorated with carvings of the heavenly dancers, the monkey gods, and the divine *tevadas* with lotus flowers in their hands. When the moon touches them with silver, the carvings look like lace lying lightly upon stone.

The temple now is deserted save for Buddhist priests and sightseers, and millions of bats that defile the floor and pollute the air with the gagging smell of their bodies—besides these, there is nothing alive in a temple where once a million men bowed before their gods.

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“Angkor Thom,” said Rollo on the second morning of my visit, as he made signs for me to mount one of the two elephants he had hired to take us to “The Great Capital,” the deserted city that lies one mile from the temple. We could have gone in automobiles, but Rollo insisted I ride as rulers had ridden, and because of his insistence I climbed to the howdah where I watched the mahout kick the elephant and strike it with an iron hook until at last the great beast heaved itself toward Angkor Thom.

The boundaries of the old city are marked by a wall, its massive stone gates arching high in primitive splendor above the roadway. Within the boundaries are the remains of a dozen buildings with enormous square towers still standing, each side of each tower cut as a huge Brahmanic face. In all parts of the city are ter-

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

ances adorned with figures of startling beauty, treasures of sculpture.

The time may come when I forget the towers and the terraces and the carvings, but I shall never forget the dreadful silence of that dead city. In Angkor Thom, "The Great Capital," one hears only the occasional call of a bird; the awful stillness sings the saga of departed pomp and power.

A thousands years ago the jungle was cut away and Angkor Thom was built. To-day the jungle is taking back its own, crumbling and swallowing proud buildings erected by proud men. Seeds dropped by birds have grown into trees and their roots have split the heads of the ancient gods. Other trees send their roots above ground and over all barriers more than a hundred feet to wrap about blocks of stone and tear them from their moorings. Myriads of small plants, the jungle's infantry, advance in almost solid formation. A thousand years the jungle has waited, watching the aspiration of man. Then man died. The living jungle crawled in to blot out the scar of civilization.

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I am writing you this letter, Roy, in the modern hotel built by the French at Angkor. I have just returned from wandering through the temple alone. Far back in the inner sanctum, I heard the liquid notes of the bamboo xylophone, played in the native village, join with the low chant of the Buddhist priests and

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come softly over the lake. The great temple stretched away from me, its stones silver in the moonlight, its shadows hiding the brooding souls of millions of men dead for centuries. . . . Long I sat listening to the xylophone and to the chanting. Long I peered at the ancient stones. And yet when I left the temple at midnight, the souls of the builders were still hidden in shadows.

### III

WITH tears in my eyes, Annette, I tell you there isn't a white elephant in Siam. The tradition was born with Barnum.

My guide in Bangkok is a Siamese named Tom, a lovable little fellow of fifty with whom I've struck quite a friendship. As each midnight steals away and the whiskey steals into his head, Tom tells me strange stories, half of which I discount because half he says is the whiskey talking; but even after I strip his exploits they still are worthy to be placed beside the adventures of Sindbad and Sataspes.

According to Tom, Barnum tried for years to buy a white elephant from the King of Siam. The king explained that the elephants were sacred, that Barnum might as well try to buy Buddha's tooth from the priests at Kandy, or Veronica's handkerchief from the Pope at Rome. But Barnum didn't believe the king. He sent new agents and offered more money. The king was infuriated. He hurried the agents out of the country and forbade others to come in.

"But that didn't worry Barnum," Tom said. "He wanted a white elephant; if he couldn't buy one, he'd make one. He chose the smallest elephant he had, then bought a big brush and a lot of whitewash. Be-

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fore each performance, the whitewash was put on and the elephant was covered with robes and trappings. Only a small part of his body was left uncovered. He was kept in a square by himself. No one was allowed near him except his keeper."

"And how do you know all this?" I asked.

"Because I was his keeper. I was the man who whitewashed him. I did it for months. Every day before each performance I covered that elephant with whitewash." Tom began to laugh. "That's how I got fired. That darned elephant got me fired." His laugh increased. "It was one night in Memphis, Tennessee. I got drunk, mighty drunk. When time came to whitewash the elephant, I got my buckets and my brush. I daubed the stuff all over his front legs, but I forgot his back legs. I left him half white and half natural color. When the crowd saw him, everybody howled. The boss elephant man heard of it and came running. He took one look at that elephant, then grabbed me. He dragged me out of the tent and kicked me off the lot."

The story is Tom's and I can't vouch for it; I don't know about the white elephants in Barnum's show, but I do know about the white elephants in Siam, because this afternoon I visited the king's palace and saw the sacred beasts chained in the royal stables.

There is so little difference between the "white" elephant and the normal elephant that I was forced to ask the keeper to distinguish one from the other. He ex-

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

plained that the Siamese name *chang penak* does not mean white elephant, but albino elephant. He showed me that the sacred elephants have pinkish toenails, pink eyebrows, light-colored eyeballs, a few yellow hairs in the tail, and a half dozen splotches of mangy pink at the base of the ears. There is nothing white about them. They are semi-albinos.

In Siam at present are two especially sacred albino elephants, one forty years old, the other five. The youngster is kept in a room with his mother, a dignified old lady normal in every way, and this afternoon he greeted me by turning half a dozen somersaults, after which he flung out his little trunk and begged for the reward of sugar-cane he accepts directly from the hands of visitors. In a separate room the other sacred elephant lives and has his stately being. Far beneath his age and dignity to turn somersaults. Instead, he looked at me and bowed, bending one knee and nodding with a slow and mighty grace; then he, too, forgot his sanctity long enough to eat sugar-cane from my hand.

In the royal grounds are other elephants whose markings are not distinct enough to indicate sanctity, yet which are too holy to be worked. They stand year after year chained to posts, treading the ground with no advance, swaying their bodies and tossing their trunks. Three days ago, two of these elephants went mad. They snapped their mooring posts and charged each other. As they fought, their trumpeting could

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be heard far out in the city; then side by side they smashed against the corral and like splinters it went down before them.

The crowd fled. But there was one who hobbled as he ran: his legs were weak. The first elephant reached out his trunk and wrapped it about the old man's body; then body and trunk swirled into the air and for an instant we all saw the man hang poised, his arms and legs waving, terror on his face; then the trunk swept downward. There was a sickening sound of a terrific impact; the body lay still in the road.

The elephant, flinging his trunk aloft and bellowing, raced away until he came to a small wooden bridge spanning a canal. He started over the bridge. It broke. The elephant's tusks buried themselves in the bottom of the canal and he lay helpless; his legs spread wide, he could not push himself erect, nor drag his tusks from the mud; nor could any man-made machinery help him. Moaning and sobbing, he drowned.

The other elephant, charging over his path of destruction, tore up trees, demolished houses, smashed a motor truck into a mass of twisted steel: he caused a panic. At last the king, realizing that the elephant could not be captured, ordered that he be shot. Armed with special guns, the royal guards rushed to that part of the city where the maddened beast was destroying and killing. They drew near him, dismounted, and made ready to fire; but they couldn't fire

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because he was moving and always there was danger of a glancing bullet's killing a man or a woman.

The captain of the guard sent for the keeper and told him that he must poison the elephant, the thing he loved more than his own wife, more than his children. The keeper flung himself face downward upon the ground, imploring the captain; but the captain said there was no other way, for no other man could approach the beast. And so the keeper, sobbing, his whole body shaking, went forward and offered the elephant sugar-cane, just as he had done a thousand times before; and the elephant, trusting the keeper, ate the cane that had been dosed with strychnine. It was four hours later that the elephant swayed upon his mighty legs, then slid to earth. It was the next morning that they found the keeper hanging from a rafter in his house.

The educated Siamese of to-day is likely to smile when asked about the sacredness of the albino elephant; he regards the belief as a superstition from the past. But such heresy does not obtain among the common people; they still believe the albino elephant holy and resent any remark about him not made in quiet reverence.



Far be it from me, Annette, to discuss lingerie, but the fact is that Siamese girls adore white cotton camisoles, which they wear as the outer and only garment above the waist. Older Siamese women wrap their

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breasts in colored cloth, but members of the younger set promenade in ninety-eight-cent camisoles. I am told that the camisole fad has only recently struck Siam, but already it has become an absolute rage, Siamese modistes insisting that no well-dressed woman can be without one. Ribbon shoulder-straps of light pink or a delicate shade of blue are preferred.

Siamese girls of the ultra-smart set complete their costume for street wear by winding a strip of colored cloth around the hips, tucking in the upper edges at the waist, and allowing the lower edges to hang one inch from the ground, thus forming a skirt. Naked feet add the final touch of naturalness to this simple and charming ensemble.

The little sisters of Siamese *débutantes*, little girls not yet of camisole age, are exceedingly modish, garbing themselves in ear rings, anklets, and a silver coverlet like a lady's mesh bag. The cords of the coverlet are wrapped around the waist and tied at the back, the coverlet itself dangling from the brows of fat little stomachs as the maidens stride along in tiny decorum.



A stranger in Siam is somewhat startled by the appearance of native babies, for at a distance their faces seem painted white; and the white face above the brown body is ghostly, like a Negro baby wearing a white mask. Tom explained that the marks and streaks are made by ordinary talcum mixed with water and daubed

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

on by the mother, who believes that this face protection, if stuck on heavily enough, keeps baby cool.

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Siamese builders have one style of architectural adornment probably unique: they decorate the entire exterior of temples and palaces with broken bits of crockery. At a distance, the effect suggests the work of the della Robbias in fifteenth-century Italy; nearer, the decorations prove to be pieces of old plates and chips from saucers.

There is one pagoda in Bangkok four hundred feet high and a quarter of a mile in circumference whose entire surface is covered with men and flowers and gods and demons, all made from fragments of broken crockery. I enjoyed most an old gentleman stroking his long white beard while he rubbed the throat of a yellow cat—and the old gentleman and the beard and the cat were made from handles of tea cups.

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The religion of Siam is Buddhism, and with the Siamese, religion, apparently, is more than a spoken creed; at some time in his life every Siamese man, from the coolie to the king, takes the vows of Buddha, shaves his head, and begs his rice from door to door. When his monastic service ends, the monk puts off the yellow robe and quietly returns to the secular life of his country.

The head of the Buddhist church is the king. One

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afternoon last week I attended a celebration of Christian missionaries. The celebration was held in the royal palace. The king was present and spoke. He, the head of the Buddhist church, graciously and with infinite courtesy spoke to his Christian guests upon the subject of tolerance.

## IV

I DON'T remember, Mac, whether it was in the fourth or fifth round that Siki smacked Carpentier the blow that sent Carpentier reeling and served as prelude to one of the most brutal beatings a boxer ever took, but I do remember the moan that went up from the French as they saw their idol crashed about the ring. "*Il est battu*," they said. "*Georges est battu*." I thought then I should never see another man take such punishment; but I was mistaken, for in Siam I have seen Siamese boxers beaten into bloody pulps, then killed.

This afternoon I went to the fights here in Bangkok. They were reminiscent of Rome, of days when a victory less than death to an opponent was effeminate. Again and again I saw men, like Euryalos, led from the ring with trailing feet, as they spat out clotted blood, and their heads drooped awry; and twice I saw a man carried from the ring dreadfully still.

Instead of leather gloves, Siamese boxers weave cotton ropes between their fingers, wrapping the ropes so that all knots are tied just above the striking surface of the knuckles. Over their trunks they wear a triangular frame of heavy wire padded with straw and extending from hip bone to hip bone and passing backward between the legs.

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After both boxers have knelt and prayed that Buddha will accept their spirits if they are killed in the fight, the timekeeper strikes an oblong drum and the fight begins. The boxers circle slowly, bending, twisting, feinting. Suddenly a low left lead is made. Down go the hands to guard against it. Like a blurred streak, the leg of the aggressor swings upward and the defendant is kicked in the throat. Staggering backward, he is kicked in the face, and falls. As he rises, he is struck in the groin by the full force of his opponent's head used as a battering ram. In retaliation he strikes a nose-smashing jab with the end of his elbow.

The fighters draw back and begin once more to circle. The crowd quickly shouts for action and the shout is answered by one boxer kicking at his opponent's face. He misses; before he can regain his balance he is struck in the mouth by his opponent's fist, the cotton ropes carrying away blotches of skin. The fighters stand toe to toe and pound each other's faces, making little attempt at self-defense. The crowd doesn't like it, knowing that the fist is not deadly and that boxers kill each other with knee, foot, and head. As the hand fighting ends, one man drops back and kicks at the other's throat. His leg is caught and twisted. Falling, his face is smashed with a jerked-up knee.

After five minutes the drum sounds and the boxers leave the ring. Two other boxers enter immediately. Each pair fight five minutes and rest five minutes. Fighting goes on continually in an open-air arena at

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

Bangkok every Sunday and Monday afternoon from four o'clock until seven.

In Siamese boxing a man may not be bitten, or kicked when he is on the floor. There are no other restrictions. A blow from any part of the body to any part of the body is legal. All boxers know that many of their opponents have had malaria, a fever that enlarges the spleen. A favorite maneuver is to force an opponent to expose the spleen, kick it, rupture it, and cause death. In two days I saw two men kicked in the spleen. They crashed against the canvas and lay there quivering until their friends picked them up and carried them away to die.

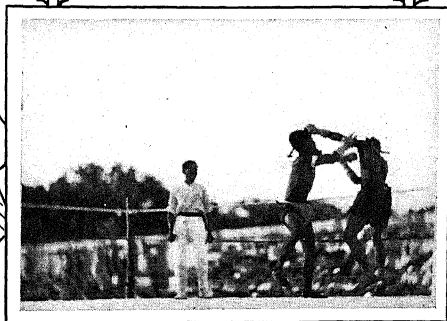
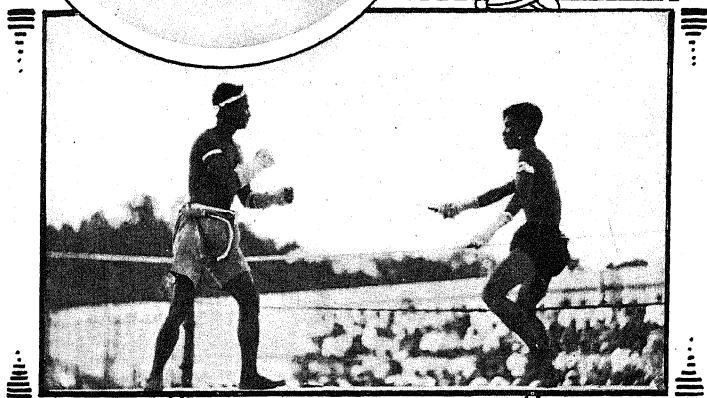
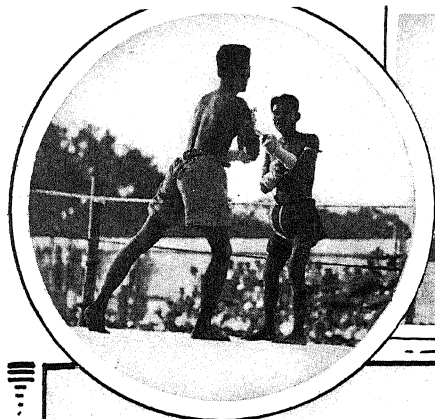
All fights in Siam are scheduled for eleven rounds. They are seldom fought to the finish: some one usually is hurt or some one quits. Little stigma rests upon the fighter who gives in and sits down to be counted out. This afternoon I saw one boxer crashed about the ring until he willingly took the count. I asked Tom why the fighter quit. Tom said: "He no quit, he dead."

The winner of a preliminary receives thirty dollars; the loser, twenty. Purses are doubled for a championship fight.

•  
•   •

Cockfighting is the second most popular sport of the Siamese. In Bangkok, fights are held every day, hundreds of men and women crouching about the pits and wagering thousands of dollars.

After the cocks have fought for five minutes,



# SIAMESE BOXING

*Upper left: Beginning of a fight.*

*Upper right: The aggressor has just kicked at his opponent's throat.*

*Center: The protection for the groin is a heavily-padded wire frame.*

*Lower: Pulling hair.*



## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

they rest five. Slashes upon their heads are sewed with a needle and silken thread. Cuts are squeezed and sucked, for clotted blood would make the birds drowsy. A few drops of water are poured down their throats and they are rubbed with a wet rag. Their feathers, those not cut from them in the fight, are smoothed. They are cooled by the slow waving of a palmetto fan. At the end of the five-minute rest they are taken back to the pit. Death usually comes from a severed throat. . . .

In cockfighting a bird can easily lose an eye. His opponent is continually leaping upward and lashing out with long sharpened spurs, raking them across the head. Inevitably eyes are torn out. In other countries, birds are sent back into the pit after one eye has been lost; in Siam, birds are made to fight after they have been totally blinded.

The Siamese cockfighter ties a string around the blind cock's head. On the end of the string is a small weight. The cock has been trained to throw his head from side to side, and when the weight strikes, to leap forward and stab with his spurs. It is said that blind birds sometimes win, but the one I saw fight was slaughtered quickly.

. . .

This letter, Mac, is like certain pages from Malory: there's nothing but fighting in it. I'm sorry, for I'd far rather write, as blessed old Anacreon said, of the sweet pain caused by Love's whip of lilies, but since

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

I've already dipped my pen in blood, I might as well tell you quickly of the strangest fight I ever saw.

In Bangkok I'm living in an old palace built by a former Siamese king, that recently has been made into a hotel where the Occident and the Orient join hands. From my window I can see the jungle, elephants passing on the state highway, and monkeys swinging from palm trees. After I turn from my window, I draw a hot bath, lay out my dinner clothes, and telephone to the bar for a gin rickey.

In this hotel I first heard of fighting fish. My room boy told me about them and said he owned two fine ones he had trapped in the canals of Bangkok. They had won many fights. They were worth fifty dollars each.

The next afternoon he brought them to my room in separate jars and put them in a bowl upon my table. Alone, the fishes, each of them the size of my thumb, were colored like aquamarine, but after they were placed together, their color changed, their bodies became gloriously iridescent; then their gills opened, exposing inflated chests of carmine; their translucent fins waved like little plumes.

They faced each other and hung poised. One drew a little to one side. The other moved to check the advance. One lifted his head to rise, and a crimson streak struck at him, sinking tiny teeth into his tail. When they drew apart and faced each other again, one of them spat out the tail he had bitten off: like a fragment from a silken veil it settled slowly. Simul-

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

taneously the two fishes struck, and their jaws locked in the death grip. Together they sank to the bottom of the bowl where for five seconds they lay still, their breathing labored, their gills heavy. Finally one of them swirled and broke the hold. Swiftly they both rose to the surface and breathed. When they had finished breathing, they sank again, and the fight went on.

Fish fights often last several hours, sometimes all day. Usually the fight is to the death: one fish drags the other to the bottom and holds him there until he is drowned. The Siamese entertain in their homes with fish fights, invite their friends, and gamble heavily.

After the two fishes had fought in my room for thirty minutes, their fins and tails were chewed until they were both very ragged specimens. I told the boy I had seen enough, and I felt a little better when he assured me that the fins and tails would grow again, that no harm had been done. I gave him two dollars, and he went away.

## V

**S**IAM, as you know, Dad, is at present the only independent state of tropical Asia, and Siam's independence has been retained chiefly because during the World War she made a gesture which temporarily tied the hands of her neighbors.

To the west of Siam is the Burma of England; to the east, the Indo-China of France.

The game began in 1893, when France decided that she wanted the Mekong river, believing that it would give her a trade route into southern China. She sent ambassadors to tell the king of Siam that the territory east of the Mekong river rightfully belonged to Indo-China, to France: Siam would have to get out.

Siam said she wouldn't get out. France was elated. A nation of brown men and small guns had refused to give up its land to white men and large guns—a notable cause for war, accepted by all white nations. France promptly sent troops into the contested area. In the fighting that followed, French soldiers were killed; everything thereby working out as France had planned.

France next hurried gunboats to Bangkok to punish the Siamese for killing Frenchmen. But the Siamese didn't want to be punished: they had merely opposed armed men who had crossed their national boundary

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

with the avowed intention of making war. They saw no reason for a punitive expedition. They, therefore, refused to admit French gunboats to Bangkok.

Such a refusal was exactly what France wanted. She immediately issued a new set of demands: Siam would have to give up both banks of the Mekong river, surrender a large slice of land, pay a huge indemnity. France informed the world that until her demands were met she would blockade Bangkok.

Siam, naturally, called on England, but nobody was at home in Downing Street: English statesmen knew that Siam had territory that England wanted; they knew, too, that if they interfered with France, then France, in turn, would interfere with them. After ten days, Siam gave in, granting every demand France made. That was in 1893.

Eleven years later, France wanted more. Without troubling to send gunboats, she drew up the papers and sent them around for Siam to sign. The new treaty gave France eight thousand square miles. That was in 1904.

In 1907, the Quai d'Orsay wanted three more provinces, having decided that it would be pleasant for France to own the ruins of Angkor and the famous Grand Lac. French ambassadors notified Siam. In this particular raid, France took another eight thousand miles.

Then it was England's turn. 'And wise old England didn't bungle the job by sending gunboats or sticking cannons in Siam's face. She knew a better way: she

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

gave up extra-territorial rights in Siam that amounted to virtually nothing, but in return for their abolition she intimated that she expected Siam to express appreciation. Siam, utterly helpless, did right nobly by her big, strong friend, giving England fifteen thousand square miles of land, a million people, and natural resources that to-day pay enormous profits.

In sixteen years, France and England had taken one third of Siam's total territory, grabbing bit by bit as they wanted it. The fate of Siam was written, for no one could doubt that England and France were diplomatically racing for the center of the country, each trying to get there first.

Then came 1917. Siam, with considerable wisdom, declared war on Germany. France and England applauded not because Siam sent an expeditionary force to France, interned alien enemies, and confiscated alien property, but because a serious blow had been dealt German commerce in southeastern Asia.

After the war, Siam reorganized her national finances, built excellent railroads, put through laudable legislative reforms, and made herself one of the finest little nations on earth. A visitor can not help praising the country and its people, nor can he help being saddened by a glance at the map. On the west, England presses in; on the east, France. A little time and England and France will forget 1917—but they will never forget that in Siam are natural resources, territory, and people.

## VI

I'M going to the fights this afternoon, Dad, because Wongkit is fighting. Wongkit is a boy from the northern hills who is so strong that men even in Bangkok heard about him. They heard that in the games he could throw the teak log farther than any other. Thinking that he might become a champion boxer, they sent for him. Six weeks ago he arrived in Bangkok, bringing his old father.

I first heard about Wongkit from Tom, my guide. "He will make a great boxer," Tom said, "greater than any we have seen." Then he cautioned me not to speak of Wongkit. "Only a few persons know of him and we want to keep him secret; we want to bet our money and get good odds. That's why we brought him."

Ten days ago Tom came to my room at the hotel. "What would you like to do this afternoon?" he asked.

"What have you?"

"Would you like to go to the market and see the silversmiths at work on bowls and boxes?"

"I've seen those silversmiths a dozen times."

"Would you care to see the Siamese infantry drilling in the park?"

"It's much too hot for that."

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

"What about a visit to the gambling houses? I know where—"

"No, thank you. And I don't want to see any temples or monasteries. And I don't want to call and drink tea with ladies of casual virtue. I'm tired of all that. You'll have to offer something really interesting to get me out in that sun."

Tom thought for a moment, then gave up. "There's nothing else," he said.

"Then take the afternoon off."

"Thank you, sir. I'll just go along and see Wongkit. He's in his training quarters and—"

I picked up my sun helmet. "Why do you guides the world over think there's nothing but temples, and scenery, and brothels? Why didn't you say something about Wongkit's training quarters?"

"But, sir, do you mean—"

"I mean we're going to see this Wongkit—that is, if he won't object to my coming."

"He would be honored. But do you really mean—"

"I mean I'd rather visit a Siamese boxer in his training quarters than see most of the temples of Bangkok."

As we drove across town, Tom told me of an elephant hunt on which he had captured two enormous bulls. He was working to a glorious climax, and the story was getting more and more imaginative, when our car drew up beside a rickety pier.

"We get out here, sir," Tom said.

We hired a small gasoline boat and crossed the

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

river that runs through the heart of Bangkok. Then we entered one of the innumerable *klongs*, or canals. . . . Bangkok often has been called the Venice of the Orient; the name is partly justifiable, for there are some sections of the city where the streets are all canals and one can travel only by boat. . . . Tom and I passed dozens of small dories, anchored in the klongs, from which merchants did their trading. We passed a floating cloth shop where a young man ~~haggled~~ <sup>haggled</sup> with two ladies on a shopping tour; they had paddled up in a crudely built canoe. We passed fish shops, dead fish hanging by their tails from the top of the sunshade over the fishmonger, live fish in wire boxes let down into the water. We passed crockery shops, hat shops, and shops where baskets were sold. We passed a warehouse from which a line of coolies loaded bags of rice on a great blunt-nosed sampán.

"Where's Wongkit's place?" I asked.

"A little farther on," Tom said, and pointed.

Behind the shops were many private homes, the backs of the frail houses resting on the ground, the fronts resting on piles driven into the mud at the bottom of the canal. From our boat Tom and I saw men and their wives and children, some working, some sleeping, some playing. Many of the smaller children had pieces of bamboo tied to them so that they would float if they fell into the water.

"But don't the mosquitoes almost eat them up?" I asked, remembering that in Bangkok one does not dine

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

without putting feet and legs into a sack of heavy cloth and tying the top above the knees.

"The mosquitoes don't bother them," Tom said. "Little babies, yes; but after they get older, the mosquitoes don't trouble them."

Traffic in the canal is made up largely of boats owned by floating peddlers. Fruit peddlers steer from house to house. Women peddlers drift along in boats filled with Siamese skirts, and bright cloths for children, and cotton camisoles for young ladies. The canal restaurateur glides about in a boat not much larger than a canoe, cold food in the bow, a small stove amidship to heat rice and meat and bits of vegetables. An entire meal is piled upon a leaf and handed to a customer squatting on the bank, or who pulls alongside in another boat.

Through these canals, Tom and I cruised until at last we came to a bamboo ladder that rose from the water. We stepped from our boat and climbed the ladder. Before us was heavy undergrowth rising from a soggy marsh. Great palm trees leaned over and splotted the canal with shadows. Leading away from the ladder were planks, laid end to end.

"Wongkit lives ahead, sir," Tom said.

We walked over the planks, mud oozing up beside them, until we came to a clearing where stood three frame houses, one of them Wongkit's.

"He will be in the back," Tom said.

We found him there, totally naked. I have never seen such a body. He was tall for a Siamese, almost

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

six feet, and the upper half of his body was a magnificent triangle; then his hips spread, and his legs rippled down in perfect symmetry. At a glance one could see his tremendous strength, his muscles live as young rattan. Wongkit's features looked less like an Oriental's than those of a Greek from the time of Praxiteles.

When Tom introduced me, Wongkit put his hands together and crouched, saluting me as royalty. I took one of his hands and shook it. He didn't understand the custom and looked puzzled until Tom explained; then slowly he shook my hand four times, nodding and smiling as he did.

In the corner of the room stood an old man with white hair and wrinkled face. Tom introduced me, and the old man bowed and spoke. "He says," Tom interpreted, "that he is Wongkit's father." In the softest and most musical voice I have ever heard, the father bade me welcome. "My house," he said, "is the master's house." Then he added: "It is gracious of the American to visit my son, Wongkit."

We sat down and watched the boy at his training. He shadow-boxed, flexed his legs, slashed backward with his elbows, rammed forward with his head; everything he did was poetry of motion. He worked for an hour and we watched. Afterward we drank tea. Then Tom and I went back to our boat. Wongkit, still naked, came with his father to see us off.

"What do you think of him?" Tom asked, as we passed through the canals.

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

"I don't know, Tom. I don't know enough about Siamese boxing, but to me he doesn't seem vicious enough."

Tom laughed. "That's because he's not fighting against any one. Wait until he gets in the ring. He will—" Tom flung out one foot and almost lost his balance—"he will win us a lot of money."

Two days later I went to see Wongkit again. The old father and I helped Tom rig up a sack of sand for Wongkit to punch and kick, then we withdrew to a corner and sat there. Neither of us could understand anything the other said, but that made no difference. We could smile and bow to each other, and with little courtesies show our friendship.

Four times I have been to see Wongkit in his training; I can't decide whether I go to see Wongkit and his rippling muscles, or the old man with his soft voice and kindly eyes. I am certain, though, that the father and I have become fine friends. Truly we have. I take him small gifts, and always he gives me little presents. On Friday he saved me some dwarf bananas. Day before yesterday he served me a double handful of rice, dipping it up in his hands and dropping it all hot on a banana leaf. He showed me how to catch it with my fingers, roll it into a tiny ball, and throw it into my mouth. At first I couldn't do it properly and he laughed. When after a time I didn't spill any, he was pleased. Then we cleansed our hands and went in to watch Wongkit at his boxing. We took our place in a corner; there was a holy prayer in the father's eyes

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

as he watched his son, as in stillness and silence the old man fondled his pride and his glory.

Yesterday Wongkit and his father asked me about boxing in America. Wongkit wanted to know about the strange world where boxers never lack rice, and have beds to sleep on. "My father," Wongkit said, "approves of my going to America. He will come with me. He will live as I live. He will have rice whenever he wants."

This afternoon Wongkit is fighting for the first time. Tom already has gone, vastly excited: he and his friends have bet all their money. I haven't bet any money, but I, too, am excited, for I have come to be fond of Wongkit, so gentle and tender with his father, and I have learned truly to love the old man. The fight is to begin in forty minutes. I must hurry to get to the ringside; I told them I'd sit in the front row. I'll finish this letter later. . . .

I promised I'd finish this letter and because of my promise I shall. Wongkit went into the ring at ten minutes after four. He wore red tights. They were a little too short for him. After he had prayed, he turned and looked at his father. The old man nodded and held up his hands, gave his blessing to his boy. It was two minutes later that the other fighter, an experienced fighter, kicked Wongkit in the spleen, ruptured it, and killed him. Wongkit fell to the canvas, trembled, and lay still.

Some day, Dad, I may forget Wongkit, for he was a young man, strong, peering over the horizon, his

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

dream bright within him; and he went out in a flash, before he knew. I may forget him, but I'll never, never forget the look of the old father as he stared at that limp thing they carried away in their arms.

## VII

DEAR DR. SHUGERMAN: To-day I spent three hours at a snake farm watching the attendants tease the King Cobra and the banded krait until the snakes struck and gave the poison from which the doctors make the life-giving antivenin. Repeatedly I wished that you, a medical man, could see the really amazing work done at this Siamese snake farm.

Siam's total population is less than ten million persons—three million native Siamese and the rest Chinese, Laos, Malays, Cambodians, Burmese, and a mixture of them all—yet in this little country there is a Red Cross hospital with an annual budget of half a million dollars raised each year by public subscription. One day last week I visited the main hospital, of which the snake farm is only a branch, and was shown through by a Siamese doctor who had taken his degree at Johns Hopkins and later had served at Mayo Institute. He introduced me to a dozen other doctors and to five nurses, all of whom had studied in the United States or in Europe. In the hospital I saw waiting rooms filled with out-patients, sick wards built according to the most modern requirements, laboratories comparable with the best in America or Germany, and operating theaters with equipment as yet unknown in some European countries.

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

"The surgeon who is about to operate, the one putting on his rubber gloves, performed a curious operation last week," my guide said. "He successfully removed a cyst from a woman, who, before the operation, weighed one hundred and twenty pounds; and, after the operation, weighed sixty pounds, the cyst having been exactly half her weight."

The doctor and I left the operating theater and walked through corridors with large airy rooms on each side. Against the snowy white pillows of the hospital beds showed the pale face of an English woman, the yellow of a Chinese boy, the brown of a Siamese girl, and the black of an Indian man. We passed one room with the door partly closed; some one inside was moaning.

"Dysentery," the doctor said. "They brought him in last night."

I heard him moan, poor devil, and I remembered a night I had ridden sprawled flat in a Mongolian bullock cart. I remembered the ambulance at the walls of Peiping, a red rose pinned on the white uniform of a Chinese nurse, the fever—I remembered nothing more.

"Is there anything I could do for him?" I asked.

"Nothing," the doctor said. "With dysentery it's rather a case of letting them live or letting them die. We can't do much about it."

We came to a cross corridor and turned down it. "There," the doctor said, "is the foundling ward. We are very proud of it."

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

There were seventeen mites in their seventeen beds. Some were Siamese, some Chinese, and two were Hindus. All lay in their little beds, and some kicked their legs, and some sang, and some lay there and stared.

"This boy," the nurse said, putting her hand on the bed of a sleeping Chinese baby, "was left on the porch last night. The watchman found him at day-break. This one, this little Hindu, was brought in yesterday by a policeman who had found him in front of a temple."

The children are kept in the hospital until they are adopted. I was offered my pick of the lot and I mightily wanted a little Siamese boy two years old who had pushed himself from the floor and had come to me, holding up a very ragged rag elephant. "*Chang*," he said, and shook his elephant. I touched it. "*Chang*," I said. The baby nodded, smiled at me, then solemnly turned around and went back to his friends and to his toys on the floor. I mightily wanted that boy.

The sight of the babies prompted me to ask the doctor about the celebrated Siamese twins. He laughed and said: "That's nothing. Siam can do much better than that." In the specimen room, he showed me pictures of triplets born joined together. "Siamese triplets," he said, "though unfortunately for the curious they died shortly after birth."

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

Last week I went to the main hospital. This afternoon I visited the snake farm as guest of a young Siamese doctor I had met one evening at dinner. He has done most of his studying in Europe; when I called this afternoon we chatted for a time about Paris and the Riviera, about cricket at Lord's, and about Münchener Hofbräu. He is particularly keen on tennis and joked me considerably about America's loss of world domination in that sport.

"Only temporary," I said. "We'll have it back before long."

"Oh, no," he laughed. "No. No. We Siamese are going in for tennis and in a few years we'll have the Davis cup in Bangkok." He opened his case and offered me a cigarette. "Furthermore," he went on, "we're going to win your golf championships. We have some fine courses in Bangkok. I'll take you out some afternoon." He pushed a bell. "Though I suppose right now I'd better take you out to the snakes."

The door opened and a laboratory attendant in a long white apron came in. The doctor spoke to him in Siamese and the man withdrew.

"Come along," the doctor said. "They're quite ready for us."

We went from his office to the laboratory, and there passed near a bench on which an attendant was dissecting a snake.

"We had to kill that cobra," the doctor said. "It had tuberculosis. We could no longer use its venom."

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

Adjoining the laboratory is a room filled with hundreds of cages; there was no sound except the scaly rustle of a huge green body sliding over some rocks in a pit built into the wall. I was peering at a silken looking snake, colored reddish gold, when suddenly behind me a great metallic hiss caused me to leap for the doctor.

"Only a hissing viper," he explained.

"Oh," I said, and my laugh was rather jerky, "that all?"

We went out of the main building, two attendants following us, toward the cement ellipse, one hundred and fifty feet long and fifty feet wide, where the snakes are kept. Immediately inside the surrounding cement wall is a three-foot moat enclosing the three compounds where the snakes live. In each compound are little cement domes, looking like beehives or miniature snow houses, that have holes in the sides through which the snakes can crawl in and out.



In the first compound lives the terrible King Cobra, twelve feet long and a killer at heart; he attacks on sight, and, if you run, races after you faster than a horse can race, rearing himself four feet in the air, and striking with the speed of a whiplash. The King Cobra's poison is so deadly that an elephant dies within half an hour after being bitten.

In the second compound live one hundred ordinary cobras. These fellows are the curse of the Orient,

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

for there are millions of them and their poison kills a man within forty minutes. . . . The cobra's poison acts differently from that of any other snake, killing by paralysis. The venom of other snakes breaks down the red blood cells, but the cobra paralyzes the central nervous system, stopping breathing.

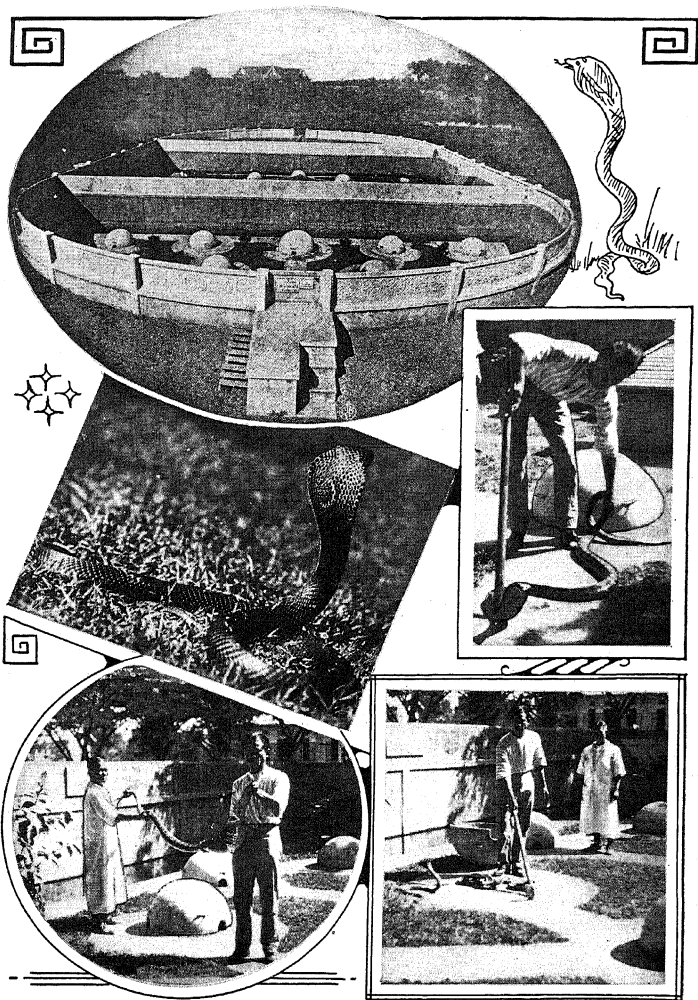
Three days ago I met an American lady in Bangkok who had been bitten by a cobra. While walking near a hedge in her garden, she felt a slight prick in her ankle, and looking down saw a cobra glide across the lawn. As quickly as possible she was taken to the snake farm and there the antivenin was injected. She told me that before it was given, she felt a general numbness, prelude to the deadly paralysis.

In the third compound is the banded krait, a brilliantly marked snake, friendly, dropping in as dinner is being served, or as you sip a whisky and soda. Fortunately he's quite a lazy chap, his poison not killing for two or three hours.

. . .

The doctor and I leaned over the wall and watched the attendants. They wore boots of extra thickness and one of them carried a wooden pole with a forked iron prong on the end; with no other protection they went down into the compound and handled the King Cobra as if he were a toy.

They caught the snake and held a saucer before its mouth. The black, forked tongue shot out with the rapidity of an electric spark jumping between two



### THE BANGKOK SNAKE FARM

*Top: In this cement ellipse live the deadly cobras and kraits.*

*Center left: An ordinary cobra.*

*Center right: The "hood" of the cobra is caused by the rising of the upper ribs into the throat at times of excitement.*

*Lower left: Holding the King Cobra before making him bite a saucer and give up his poison.*

*Lower right: The attendants have no protection except a long pole and extra thick boots.*



## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

poles. They waited until the snake opened its jaws; then they forced the saucer inside. Instantly the fangs closed upon it and the poison sacs emptied themselves through the upper teeth that are hollow like hypodermic needles. As the snake drew back, a small thimbleful of clear, creamy liquid, with the fluidity of thick gruel, slid down the saucer.

"That poison," said the doctor, "will be injected into horses that have been rendered immune by repeated and increased doses of the venom. The anti-venin is made from the horse serum." He pointed across the lawn. "There are the stables. Come over, and I'll show you the horses."

We started away, but I looked back at the men in the compound with the King Cobra. The doctor smiled. "They're all right," he said. "They'll toss the snake into the moat and leave the compound. They're quite accustomed to the work."

In the stable, we saw four horses, sleek and fit, munching their food.

"They're not troubled by the poison being injected?" I asked.

"Not at all. They're entirely immune. We start with very small doses and gradually increase until—"

The door of the stable was flung open. An attendant rushed in. He spoke rapidly in Siamese, but before he finished, the doctor was running for the door.

"*Nous allons, vite,*" he called to me. "*Vite.* Quickly. Quickly."

We raced for the laboratory building. Inside, in

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

the treatment room, I saw doctors grouped about a small girl in a coma. No respiration could be found. No pulse could be found. She looked dead.

And then the antivenin was made ready. The hypodermic sucked it up. The doctors bared her arm. The needle was plunged in. And I swear to you, doctor, it was a miracle: one instant she was lying as if dead, her parents muttering prayers for the departed; then the antivenin was shot into her blood—the needle was hardly out before she was visibly breathing. A moment later she was conscious. An hour later she walked without assistance. . . . The doctor told me that the little medical drama is enacted in Bangkok twenty times each month.

Siamese doctors are no longer satisfied to work in Bangkok alone. Every morning they hurry forth with glass tubes filled with fresh antivenin. They hand them to little Siamese men who finger levers and gaze at quivering instruments.

There is the roar of a plane—

A blast of dust—

A black speck in the heavens—

It is Siam's answer to the King Cobra!

Siam, little Siam, is sending life to her people!

## VIII

I'M writing this letter, Mac, on board ship sailing down the Malay peninsula, three hours out of Singapore. Exactly one week ago I caught the international express in Siam and started south on this journey, one of the most memorable I've ever made.

While in Bangkok I met a Siamese boxer named Wongkit. The boy was killed one day in a fight, and afterward I did a little favor for his father. The old man was very grateful and called on me the day before I left Bangkok, but the hotel clerk told him I was away visiting a snake farm.

The next morning when I arrived at the station, Wongkit's father was waiting for me. He spoke in his soft voice, but I couldn't understand. Tom, my guide, was inside the coach arranging luggage: there was no one to translate. Finally the old man bowed and handed me a round basket the size of a hat box, making signs that it was a gift. I began to untie the little grass rope that bound the basket. Wongkit's father helped me. And when the rope was untied, the old man lifted the top.

I suppose the persons who came racing up must have thought me mad. Then they saw what I was shouting about and they, too, fled; for inside that

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

basket was a six-foot cobra. As the top came off the basket, the cobra's head and hood came up with it, his wicked little tongue darting in and out within a foot of my face. Wondrous things happened to my insides, and for an instant I was frozen, but for an instant only; then I dropped basket and snake and legged it for the car. Inside, I grabbed Tom, who had been penned in by people diving through the entrance, and told him to get the snake and chop its head off, or do something else equally final with it.

Tom went out on the platform and I saw him speaking with Wongkit's father, who had picked up the snake and returned it to the basket, and who stood there, holding the basket and looking utterly wretched. A moment later Tom came back inside.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said, "but Wongkit's father is heartbroken. At the hotel yesterday he heard you were visiting the snake farm, and he supposed you were interested in snakes. All last night he searched and at daybreak this morning caught this fine cobra. He himself with a bamboo knife cut out the fangs from the snake and brought it down as a farewell gift to you. It is entirely harmless, sir, and if you don't accept it the old man will be forever sad, for it is a gift from himself and from the spirit of his dead son. Won't you take it, sir? It would make him very happy. You could dispose of it after the train leaves the station."

"I don't care anything about his feelings. What about mine?" I'm afraid I spoke a little louder than

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necessary. "Open a basket and have a great snake shove his head into my face! You kill it, I tell you. You kill it plenty dead."

"But, sir, if—"

"But nothing. Kill it."

Tom started away, and as he moved from the door I could see out on the platform. The old father was still there, still holding the basket, still gazing toward me, sorrow and sadness heavy upon him.

"Tom," I called, "are you absolutely certain that snake is harmless?"

"I'm positive, sir. Wongkit's father opened the cobra's jaws and showed me that the fangs are gone. It would be impossible for the snake to harm any one."

I looked out at the old man. He saw me and held the basket toward me. "Very well, Tom, I'll take it; but I want you to tie that rope and tie it tight."

"It's kind of you, sir, very kind of you. And won't you come out and say good-by?"

As I came near Wongkit's father, he poured out his apologies for having frightened me, assuring me that despite the snake's size and fine condition it was completely harmless.

"He wishes you to carry it as a mascot, as a memory of your visit to Siam," Tom translated.

"You tell him," I said, "that I promise never to forget. This snake will always be a memory to me."

Then the whistle blew; Tom took the snake-basket into my compartment, and hurried out again to tell

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

me good-by. I shook hands with Wongkit's father, and as he looked at me I forgot the snake. I thought of his dreams for his boy and how those dreams had ended, leaving him only the gray vista of a childless old age. I turned away and went quickly into the coach. A moment later the train drew out of the station and I waved. Both Tom and Wongkit's father bowed.

Inside my compartment, I began to arrange my luggage. I was looking at that infernal basket and debating how best to get rid of it when a doctor from Indiana and a professor of physics from Connecticut, two lovable men I had met in Bangkok, came in, both shaking with laughter.

"Hear you had a going-away gift," said the doctor.

"My soul," said the professor, "but you were marvelous when you opened that basket. And I've never seen such grace as when you leapt for the car door."

I said nothing. A man who has just looked a six-foot cobra in the face is in no mood for pleasantries.

"What did you do with it?" the professor asked.

I pointed under the seat. "There it is."

They stepped back.

"You're not going to keep it!"

I hadn't intended to keep it, heaven knows, but they had seen my terror on the platform and laughed about it: I determined to be revenged. "Certainly," I said. "I'm very much interested in snakes."

"But you can't travel around with a live cobra. Suppose it got loose. It might bite somebody."

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

"Not at all." I waved aside the possibility. "I'd just play to it with my mouth organ. I'd make it dance. Watch." I opened a traveling bag and took out the mouth organ I had bought in Korea to play to little kitchen wenches in my hotel at Seoul. "I'll show you." I reached for the snake's basket. "This cobra has a fine musical ear."

"You won't show me," said the professor, and darted through the door.

"Nor me," said the doctor, and slammed the door behind him.

I pulled down the shades of my compartment, though I left the windows open so that my friends could hear me serenade the snake, and for half an hour I played the mouth organ. Then a knock sounded on the door and the conductor came in, awfully sorry, but since other passengers had complained, and since there was a law against traveling with live cobras, even as pets, he would have to ask me to kill the snake.

"Certainly not," I shouted, so that every one could hear. "Certainly I won't kill him. He's a fine six-foot cobra, and I wouldn't think of killing him."

"But, sir, the cobra is a very deadly snake and if he got out of his basket he might—"

"Nonsense. I'd just play to him with my mouth organ. I won't let him be killed, I tell you. Anyhow, I'm not going to let the snake out more than five times each day and night. That's all the exercise he needs."

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

"I'm sorry, sir," the conductor started again, "I'm afraid that—"

But I signed to him to keep quiet and I whispered that the snake's fangs had been pulled, that he was utterly harmless, and that I was only playing a joke, paying my friends for laughing at me. The conductor nodded and put his finger to his lips. He went away and I continued to play the mouth organ. A few minutes later the professor and doctor came and stood outside my door. They knocked and I called for them to come in.

"We don't want to come in," they said. "See here, are you totally mad? You can't travel about with a live cobra. You really can't, you know."

I opened the door. "You should just see him dance to 'Mighty Lak a Rose.' He's marvelous at that and—"

"If you kill it, we'll pay for having it stuffed in Singapore."

"Kill this snake! I should say not. I wouldn't think of killing a snake with such marvelous fangs. Just look. I'll show you."

Then I made a mistake and overplayed my hand, for I cut the rope, took the top off the basket, and as that vicious looking head shot up, I reached out as if to grasp the snake. I saw the doctor and the professor look at each other, then go away.

I sat alone for a long time, then went out into the train and walked around. In one compartment a bridge game was going on. Every one talked about

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

bridge. I mentioned snakes. They went on talking about bridge. Again I mentioned snakes. No one seemed to hear. I gave up, and went to the compartment where the doctor and the professor were discussing health conditions in the Orient. They had nothing to say about snakes. They had no time to listen about snakes. They weren't interested in snakes.

I supposed my little joke had died its proper death and I wasn't sorry, for I have no natural affection for six-foot cobras even if their fangs are gone. I returned to my compartment, planning to throw the snake out of the window; but when I got back, the snake and the basket were gone. I knew, of course, that one of my friends had slipped in, stolen the basket and the snake, and thrown them off the train. I was pleased; I had no desire to see anything more of the terrifying gift.

That night at dinner I sat with the professor, the doctor, and the doctor's wife. I ordered a steak. After the others had been served, the dining-car attendant brought me a big covered platter. He held it close before me, then lifted the lid. I nearly fainted; because as the lid went up, the head and hood of a cobra went up with it. I bounced from my chair and my whoop sounded loud and clear. The professor and the doctor and the doctor's wife didn't even glance up; they quietly continued their conversation. I glared at them, then sat down again.

"Take that snake out of here," I told the attendant, "and throw it off the train."

The man bowed, covered the snake, and went

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

away. I didn't say anything. Neither did the professor or the doctor.

After dinner a bridge game was started. We played until one o'clock before saying good-night. I went to my compartment and undressed. I was entirely naked when I raised the lid of the bag that held my pajamas. As the lid came up, a cobra shot his head almost into my face, and I didn't even hesitate; I flung open the door and dived into the passageway. And in the passageway stood every American and European on the train. Men and women, too, they all stood there. The ladies turned their backs, but there was no other recognition of my naked presence.

"Boy," I bellowed, "come get this damn snake."

"I beg your pardon, sir," the professor said to the doctor, "but is it customary for gentlemen on Siamese trains to travel entirely in the nude?"

"The nude be hanged," I said. "There's a cobra in my traveling bag."

"Play to him with your mouth organ," said the professor. "He has a fine musical ear."

I swelled my chest. I opened my mouth to express my fury—then one of the ladies laughed, then the doctor laughed, then everybody laughed. Suddenly in a window I saw myself standing in the passage, one hand raised and all of me naked as Adam. I jumped back into my compartment, but remembered the cobra and hurried out again, catching up a towel and wrapping it around me as I stepped back into the corridor.

"He's all dressed," the doctor said.

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

"Not quite," the professor said, and brought me a dressing gown.

I put it on and joined in the laughing. The attendants went into my compartment and got the snake and carried it before them to the dining car, where they killed it. Until far into the morning we celebrated the funeral rites. We made up dirges of great sorrow and sang them in full four parts. We poured out libations into saucers for the dead snake. We poured out golden and bubbling libations into glasses for ourselves.

The ceremonies ended with a celebration of the funeral games. We contrived many curious contests, and, like Achilles, we ordained noble prizes, and, like Silenus and his company, we drank them down with great hilarity. The Siamese attendants thought us a crowd of completely mad foreigners. They especially thought so when the professor and the doctor improvised a cobra dance to my mouth organ.

## IX

THE morning I left Birmingham, one year ago it was, Annette gave me the journal in which I am now writing.

"I want you to write in it at least twice each week. You promise me you will?"

"Certainly I promise."

"That's awfully sweet of you, dear," she said. "Especially since I know you won't."

She was right. I haven't opened it since I left China two months ago. My negligence is reprehensible, yet in it I have the fellowship of every traveler I know. We all begin our great adventure with journals and notebooks, believing that what we see and record will be of interest to our friends and of value to learned societies; but soon we are cured of that megalomania, we forget our friends, we lose interest in learned societies; we just travel, and at times we enjoy it, and at times we hate it. One day we are all excited about the ruins of Angkor; the next day we'd give you Angkor and two-thirds of China for a good steak and a sliced tomato. I've known the time I'd have traded the Orient and everything in it for a dish of ice cream with some marshmallow poured over it, and some chocolate syrup over the marshmallow, with nuts and a cherry on top.

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

Travelers in far countries yearn mightily for the little luxuries they enjoyed at home. Furthermore, they want luxuries which at home they never wanted. They imagine all kinds of desires. Last week I was talking with an absolute epicure who said he'd sell his soul for a pickled pig-foot and a dill pickle. The inability to satisfy these petty yearnings is irritating, for it is yet another indication that one is away from his own land, his own people, his own customs; that realization is depressing.

In Indo-China, in Siam, in Malay, you are an outsider, an *auslander*. You don't belong. You're merely on your way to nowhere. How long before the next ship sails?

You see the Great Wall of China and your soul trembles. You sail through the Inland Sea of Japan and are drunk with the vivid beauty. You stand before the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok, and worship. But what of it? It's men you want to know. Years ago Lord Essex wrote the Earl of Rutland that he'd rather go a hundred miles to talk with a wise man than five miles to see a city. And the wise men of the Orient are denied you. You can't talk their language. You, a tourist, a foreigner, can only bow before them, then go your way in full ignorance of their wisdom.

Neither can you know anything of the ordinary people who pass you by, and pass you by. They look straight ahead. There is not even that language of the turning eyeball which blessed old Walt Whitman

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

understood and celebrated. They have their jobs and go about them. You are an *auslander*. You don't belong. How do you pay for the air you breathe? Do you plant rice? Do you weave cloth?

They don't understand you. You don't understand them. You and they can't speak with each other, and, even if you could understand their words, you, an Occidental, could never know the truths that are theirs before they are born, the ageless mysteries that give serenity to their Oriental souls.

At times you get terribly lonely. I suppose that's why I left off wandering the streets and came to my room to write in this journal.

•  
•   •

Singapore is an island twenty-seven miles long and fourteen miles broad, lying off the tip of the Malay peninsula and connected with it by a stone causeway two hundred yards in length. One hundred years ago, when Britain bought the little island from the Sultan of Johore, it was all jungle. To-day the town of Singapore, built at the southernmost part of the island, is the tenth port of the world. Last year twelve thousand ships stopped there, justifying the boast "Singapore: the Crossroads of the East."

When I first arrived, I was disappointed. The name Singapore is an alluring song that sings itself in the blood of every adventurer, whether he sets out to sail into the afternoon sun, or goes to his office each morning at nine. Years ago I knew that some

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day I should sail to Singapore; yet as I stepped ashore two weeks ago the bubble burst. Except for the presence of brown and yellow faces, I might as well have gone ashore at New Orleans or Marseilles.

I was met by three friends and their wives who took me for tiffin to the home of one of them. In the afternoon we played golf. At six o'clock we went to a perfectly modern hotel, had tea, and danced to a very jazz orchestra from Chicago. The trap-drummer sang through a megaphone. He sang "My Baby Just Cares for Me." That evening, in dinner jackets, we dined at the hotel, then hurried off to the theater to see Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman*.

At the clubs, at the theaters, on the playing fields, along the esplanade, at the hotels, Singapore is London. But during two weeks I've found other parts of the town in which Singapore is Singapore. At night when all alone I wander through side streets, or take a sampan and sail out into the harbor, I find the Singapore I knew before I saw it. I see faces that tell me nothing, and lights that forever burn low. I hear the soft medley of a myriad strange sounds. And I know that behind colored curtains are strange kisses and prayers to monstrous gods.

In the harbor of Singapore one still sees the quinquireme of Nineveh, stately Spanish galleons, and dirty British traders. Last night at dusk I leaned out of my window and looked down at a thousand ships riding in the harbor. I saw white yachts and

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

tattered Chinese junks, men-of-war, and trading vessels tired of beating the seven seas. Then darkness came and riding lights appeared. All night they burned, and I knew that they burned only for me, only that I might lean out of my window and peer at them gleaming there beneath the smudge of the masts.

. . .

The incongruity of the East is indicated by conditions at my hotel in Singapore. Every afternoon there is a *thé dansant* in a fine ballroom. At night there is a cabaret. At the bar one can get any of the standard cocktails. In my room there is electric light. There is a shower bath. There is no other plumbing.

. . .

The Chinese of Singapore celebrate weddings by hiring a troupe of actors who erect a theater and for a week perform plays near the home of the groom. The public is invited and tea is served.

One afternoon I entered a wedding theater not knowing I was a guest at a nuptial celebration. An old gentleman served me tea and I drank it, then offered to pay. He smiled and courteously refused the money.

That night at the hotel I learned of my rudeness. I was sincerely humiliated and next morning hurried back with an interpreter who explained my ignorance and protested my apologies. The old Chinaman again

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smiled, refused my apologies, and asked forgiveness for himself. "I should have taken the money," he said. "That would have prevented humiliation." He invited me into his home, served me tea, and, as I was leaving, gave me the seven presents a Chinaman always gives a departing guest. In accordance with the custom I gave back six presents, keeping one, a beautiful scroll picture. . . . The next morning I carried out my part of the tradition by sending the old Chinaman an electric toaster of the same value as the picture he had given me.

•  
•   •

While I was going through the native quarter at eleven o'clock one night I saw a shop where the shutters were not up, a man sitting in front, smoking. He was barefooted and wore the white trousers and cotton undershirt of the native, but when I got nearer to him I saw that he was white.

"Good evening," I said, because I was lonely. "Good evening," I said again.

The man took his pipe from his mouth. "How do you do?"

"Is this the road to Raffles Hotel?" I asked, knowing full well that it wasn't.

"No. You're walking in the wrong direction."

I lighted a cigarette. "I'm a stranger in Singapore," I said.

"Oh"— The monosyllable was neither exclamation nor query.

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"Yes," I went on, "I came in three days ago on the mail boat from Penang."

He didn't say anything. I looked beyond him, into the shop, a little stall like thousands of others in Singapore.

"Do you have any fine silks?" I asked. "I'm keen on silks."

"We have no silks," he said. "We sell only the cloth the natives buy."

Without asking me to sit down, without even looking at me, he went on smoking and staring into the heavy night with its air warm like blood.

Inside, a baby cried. A moment later the curtain at the back of the shop was raised and a Malay girl came out with her baby in her arms. As she passed the lamp I saw that the child was Eurasian. The girl came out on the pavement and squatted on her haunches, holding the child in her arms and making curious crooning sounds.

"That baby can cry, all right," I said.

"Yes," said the man. "Kicks up an awful schemozzle."

"Schemozzle"—and I smiled. "Rather strange to hear that word in Singapore. I haven't heard it since I left Oxford."

"I thought you were an American," the man said.

"I am, but I took my degree at Oxford ten years ago."

"Is that so?" He packed his pipe. "I took my

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degree there eighteen years ago. I read jurisprudence."

. . .

Singapore is the center of the most important rubber district in the world. In 1877, rubber trees were first planted in Malay, and since that time rubber has thrived on the peninsula beyond the dreams of avarice. The success of the enterprise is due chiefly to perfect climatic conditions: an annual rainfall of one hundred inches, an annual mean temperature of eighty degrees Fahrenheit.

I have visited several plantations and watched the laborers cut the trees and gather the milk-white sap; then I've gone to factories and seen the sap washed, treated chemically, and dried in the sun or smoke-house. At all these factories English-speaking natives have said: "After it is smoked it is ready to be shipped to America." Always it is America they consider the great market. The more one travels, the more he realizes that the people of the world expect America, the United States, to be the great industrial glutton for raw materials.

. . .

I met a salesman for a famous American brand of safety razor blades. He was seated at a table beside the ballroom and invited me to have my dinner cocktail with him. I sat down and we talked of Malay and of the islands. He was pleased that there was

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

inter-breeding between the white race and the brown.

"You see," he said, "the brown man has almost no beard at all, but let a white man take a brown woman, and their children will have fine, stiff beards."

•  
•   •

Opium is sold in Singapore as openly as ice cream is sold in New York or tea in London. In most Oriental countries opium is smoked surreptitiously, for technically it is illegal and there is a pretense of suppressing it; but in Singapore there is no suppression, only a British government monopoly. In Singapore are many *chandu* houses, open to the public and licensed by Great Britain. It is said that the revenue derived from opium, combined with the revenue derived from whisky, is sufficient to pay Britain's expenses in governing Singapore.

Opium is taken from a poppy cultivated in most countries of Asia. In the spring the flower drops, leaving the stalk topped with a round pod the size of a golf ball; this pod is the true treasure house of the Orient, for it contains the juice from which opium is made. When the pods are ripe, a man makes a slight cut in each of them; slowly the juice exudes, at first milky, then turning brown and gummy. Other workers pass along the row carefully gathering the gummy juice which afterward is pressed and dried in the sun or heated in great caldrons.

Orientalists say there is only one way to control the sale of opium: it must be choked off at its source, the

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

poppy put under international supervision and only enough grown to give the opium needed in medicines. Then they laugh: Chinese war lords use the opium tariff to line their pockets, Britain appreciates the tremendous revenue derived from opium grown in India, Persia and Turkey sell opium, and so long as money is made, so they say, governments will not curtail the growth of the poppy; the little scarlet flower will continue to bloom despite the wise and pious speeches made regularly at the League of Nations in Geneva. . . .

There has been much nonsense written about opium and its effects, for opium does not commonly induce dreams in which the smoker beholds gorgeous women performing sensual dances. It may affect some persons in that fashion, but the person and not the opium deserves credit. Intrinsically, opium contains no amorous stimulant; indeed, its continued use brings about a lessening of those interests, and eventually, so a score of confirmed smokers have told me, causes a total cessation of rapturous enthusiasms.

Three nights ago I smoked my first pipe of opium. As the servant prepared the gum for me, I babbled of poppy, mandragora, and all the drowsy syrups. I thought of golden halls and sweet voices softly singing, of black-eyed damsels kept in pavilions, whom no man had enjoyed, not even a Djinn. My spirit was prancing. Then I began to smoke. Ten minutes after I finished, I was actively nauseated. The next day I had a dry mouth and a heavy head.

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

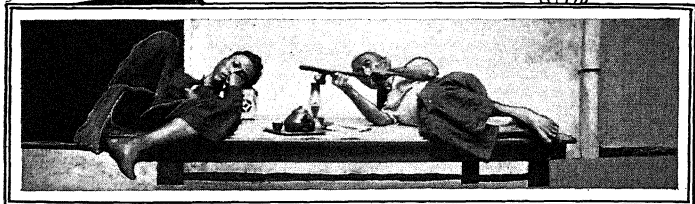
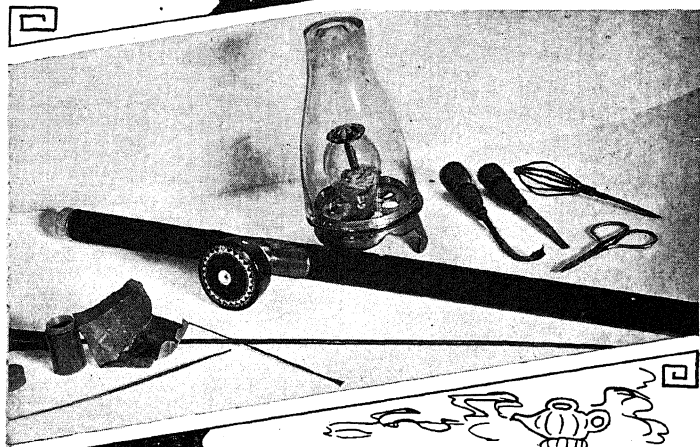
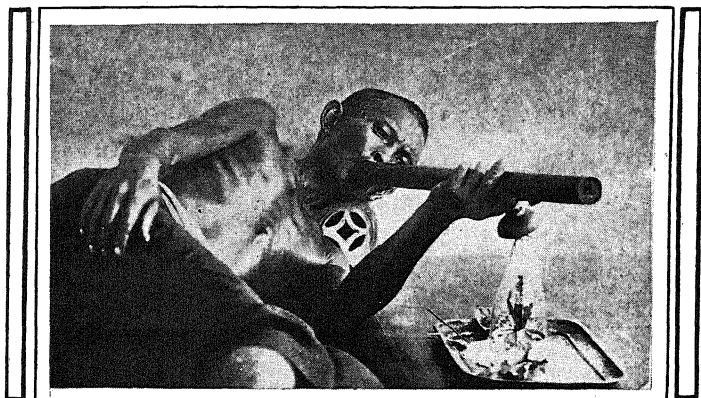
I have been told that one quickly overcomes these initial physical discomforts and that within a fortnight's smoking can contract the habit. And the habit, some medical authorities of the Orient believe, is not so pernicious as is commonly supposed; they insist that two or three pipes each day harm no man, though they admit that fifty and a hundred injure the body and brain, causing bones to push hard against yellowed skin, dry and tight, and the brain to become foggy and distraught.

The belief that opium soon drifts one off to sleep is false. One night in China while a gentleman and I chatted in his smoking room from nine in the evening until one in the morning, he continually smoked opium. Occasionally he sipped hot tea, for opium quickly dries the throat, but otherwise his opium affected him no more noticeably than my tobacco affected me. When I was ready to leave, he saw me to my car, advised with me about the purchase of some jade, then bade me good night and went quickly back into his house.

. . .

It was on Malay Street, off Orchard Road, that a brown man spoke to me. "Good evening, master," he said.

I knew what he wanted, what all brown men want when they speak to white men in Malay Street, but I was not interested in naked Chinese women who dance slow dances, neither did I desire "to have nice girl,



## OPIUM

*Top: A Chinese smoking.*

*Center: The little bone box in which opium is carried, a bit of palm leaf with gum opium on it, the pipe, the lamp, instruments for cleaning the pipe, and the tiny scissors for trimming the lamp wick.*

*Bottom: Two coolies smoking in a Singapore "chandu" house.*



## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

fine girl—what color girl you like?”, nor did I care “to have nice boy, fine boy—what color boy you like?”.

“Good evening, master,” he said again, as I passed him by.

“Good evening,” I said, and didn’t stop.

“See something, master?”

“No, thank you.”

He put his hand to the front of his little white jacket, patting a bulge there.

“See something you not see before?” he asked.

I stopped. “What is it?”

“You come see,” he said, and started back the way we had come. “You come see.”

I followed him to a narrow entrance where he raised a dirty red curtain and stood aside.

“What have you got?” I asked. “I don’t want a girl. I don’t want a boy. I’m not interested. What have you got?”

“No girl, master. No boy, master. You come see.”

I stooped and entered a small room just off the pavement. The little brown man looked back to see if any one was watching. No one was. Carefully he spread the curtain before the entrance, then came over and stood by the light.

“You see,” he said, and took from the front of his jacket a wrinkled and shriveled thing with coarse black hair growing from the top. He put it on the table and stepped back, looking at it with loving admiration. “You see,” he said again.

“But what in God’s name is it?” I asked.

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

"Head," he said simply. Then he added: "Fine head you ever see." He parted the hair and I saw dried eyeballs, features hideous and repulsive. "You buy, master?" he called to my back, as I pulled aside the curtain and hurried into the fresh air. "You buy, master?" he repeated, as he followed me along the street. "Human head make fine paperweight, fine ash tray."

## X

THE Dutch mail ships that ply between Singapore and Java leave Singapore at four o'clock in the afternoon. The day I went aboard, a thick mist was wetting everything. I saw my luggage into my stateroom, then returned to the deck. I didn't know any one on board, and I dreaded the forty-hour run to Java. For ten minutes I refused offers from the ubiquitous Oriental peddlers of postcards and worthless souvenirs; then a steward appeared and sent the peddlers and all visitors ashore. A moment later the pilot called an order from the bridge. Barefooted Javanese sailors cast off the shore lines, and the big ship swung from her moorings. I was tremendously lonely as that Dutch ship set out to cross the equator and sail on to Java.

All afternoon I walked the deck, ignoring the spray and the mist, until at last the dressing gong sounded and I went below to change. When I returned to the smoking room I found that the few passengers there had already formed little drinking-groups. I drank alone, peering out at the heavy darkness that clung like a wet pall about the ship and that blurred our lights as they quivered over the black mirror that was the sea. For a time I listened to the salty hiss at the

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

bow, and to the groan of the ship as she rode the swell; then I went below.

The dining-room steward gave me the last seat at a table with five other persons, placing me between an American lady and a Dutchman named Rutgers, manager of a Javanese cinchona plantation who was returning from a trip to Malaya. The American woman said she was going to Java on business. With me she registered a brusk self-satisfaction—one of those women who do things. I had frequently seen her type in New York offices, sometimes in Chicago, occasionally in Cleveland. We were eating our papaya when the Dutchman asked what we intended seeing in Java.

"There is so much that is interesting," he said. "In Batavia, for instance, you must see the canal where the women wash their clothes and wash their bodies. You must see the skull of the eighteenth century traitor whose head was cut off and preserved as a warning. You must see an old cannon"—the Dutchman smiled—"that old cannon is probably the most curious thing in Java. Where it came from, no one knows. How it got where it is, no one knows. Its history is a complete mystery, in fact. It's just an ordinary cannon made two or three hundred years ago, a rusty old thing of no use whatever. Even its carriage is gone and it lies flat upon the ground at the side of the road. Yet, somehow, the years and superstition have made it a symbol. Women come to it as pilgrims, imploring the blessing it is supposed to give."

"How do you mean?" I asked.

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

He hesitated for a moment, evidently searching his English vocabulary for the right words. "Well, you see," he said, "a cannon, any cannon, is a symbol of death, but the natives of Java have made this old gun a symbol of life. Women who have no children, who apparently are barren, go to this cannon, buy orchids and gardenias, orchids mostly, and offer them as prayers. Some women scatter paper flowers over it, others put little lanterns beside it, but mostly they put orchids, for orchids, they believe, are the most effective prayers for a child. Silly, isn't it?"

No one else answered him; so I volunteered a polite agreement. The Dutchman asked if I was traveling merely to see what I could see. I admitted that I was.

"And you're going to Java on business?" he asked the American lady.

"Yes," she told him.

She told me the same thing the next afternoon in the lounge of the ship. At tea time, coming in from the starboard side, I saw her alone at a small table. She nodded and maybe she smiled, though I couldn't be sure. I said I had not seen her all day.

"Been busy in my stateroom," she said. "Getting some reports ready. Sit down. Have tea with me."

I sat down and she signaled to the boy. He brought me tea. She made no offer to pour it. She let me care for myself.

"Too bad," I said, and said it merely to make conversation, "that you have to work on ship."

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

"I work all the time." She finished her tea and pushed the cup aside with an abrupt gesture. "Don't know anything but work. On board ship, on shore, it's all the same to me."

"Must be tiresome to work all the time," I guessed.

"I'm not so sure." She lighted a cigarette and smoked like one accustomed to it. "Good thing to work all the time."

"To do that you must be in awfully interesting work."

"I am. I deal in rice."

"Do you own plantations?"

"I'm a buyer and shipper."

"It must be"—I repeated myself—"awfully interesting."

"It is." She moved the teapot aside and leaned a little over the table. "Do you know that rice feeds four-fifths of the world? In Java, for example, two and three crops are harvested each year. Each acre averages two thousand pounds of rough rice. After the husk, which we sell as fuel, has been removed, the amount of food to the acre is still six times the food in the wheat lands of the United States. The annual rice crop of the world is eighty million tons." She inhaled quickly. "But the great interest in the rice game is buying and selling and shipping. Wheat and cotton and corn dealers have an easy time compared with the daily gamble of rice buyers. Why, do you know—"

"It must be thrilling," I said, because I'd heard

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

enough about rice. Furthermore, I'd seen the woman bare herself and I wasn't interested. She had only one enthusiasm: rice. She knew nothing but rice and trading in rice. She wanted nothing but to buy and sell rice.

"It is thrilling," she said, and turned to look over the sea.

We were sailing past the island of Sumatra; the palm trees and bamboo trees could be plainly seen from the lounge of our ship. The woman looked at them. I saw that she wasn't such a big woman, after all. I decided that she gave that impression because she sat erect and because she carried herself well. I decided, too, that she was somewhat defensively aggressive, though why I decided that I couldn't say. She was probably forty years old, yet her hair was not gray at all. Her hands, too, were noticeable: smooth, shaped like a sculptor's dream of rhythm. And her voice was not the voice of a hurried business woman: it was tender, tired.

For several minutes we didn't speak; then I said: "You are going to Java to buy rice?"

"Yes; to buy rice and to meet my husband."

"Your husband?"

"Yes. He travels. I stay in Shanghai and care for the office. We meet once every six months to plan our work."

"It will be awfully nice to see him," I said. "Will he meet you in Batavia?"

"He'll not arrive until two days after we land."

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

"Then you'll have to come sightseeing with me."

But she said she couldn't: she wouldn't have time; there would be papers and cables and reports and a thousand duties. I told her I was sorry, and I really was. Despite her pride in her business ability, I liked her. Indeed, I liked her so much that on the morning we docked I again asked her to go sightseeing with me.

"Can't do it," she said. "I've work to do—worlds of it."

After a bath at the hotel, I started out to make my official connections, to carry out the little courtesies expected of travelers in the East: I left cards with the Dutch authorities and called on the American Consul-General. At the bank I got my mail and Dutch money.

In the afternoon I slept and read until after the air had been cooled by the daily rain; then I called a taxi and drove by the canal to see the women washing their clothes and their bodies in the muddy water; visited the famous skull of the eighteenth century traitor, a ghastly monument which I left quickly; and at dusk told the chauffeur to drive me to the cannon where prayers are offered by women apparently barren. He did, but I didn't get out of the car, for as we stopped near the cannon, I saw a woman pointing with a hand like a sculptor's dream of rhythm. "Please," she said to a flower vendor, "I want a dozen orchids."

## XI

YOUR history book, Dad, will tell you that Java now belongs to the Dutch, that once it belonged to France, then to England. But don't you believe it. Java belongs to God! Through the ages the island has served as his chief laboratory for botanical experiments, and the results of his labors have surpassed his dreams, for in Java he has achieved such fragile and fantastic beauty in both form and color that undoubtedly he marvels at his own handiwork.

In the savannahs, in the forests, beside the roadway, I have seen the hibiscus flower with its furry red pistil, and the frangipani, and the pale green petal of the ylang-ylang tree. I have seen the orchid, a bubble from God's own blowpipe, floating upon the tropic air. I have smelled the spicy fragrance of the kanaga flower and tasted the mangosteen. I have lived: I have been to Java. . . .

Into the natural color of the island blends the brilliance of the native dress, for men, women, and children wear *sarongs* upon which fanciful designs are dyed in colors like the soft splendor of Javanese birds and trees and flowers. Besides their sarongs, the men wear white jackets and wrap their heads with cloth of the same color and design as their skirts; the women

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

wear tight-fitting shirt waists of white or pink organdy, elaborately embroidered, and crown their doll-like beauty with yellow and sweet-smelling temple flowers woven into the finely spun jet of their hair.

While the favorite color of the sarong is a deep, rich brown, one sees them of every color, sometimes with the predominant motif a bird of blue with a tail of orange, sometimes decked with flowers that grew on the rainbow. Three days ago I saw a sarong with a background of dark brown rectangles locked one into the other; against that background, peacocks of dull purple tilted their scarlet heads.

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In Java one is supposed to sleep without top covering, but as yet I haven't learned to do it; I always insist upon having a second sheet. Three nights ago I was stopping at a hotel where the manager spoke only Malay and Dutch. I speak neither and could not tell him of my wish for a top sheet. I decided, therefore, to wait until I got to my room and sign to the boy. In the room, I pulled back the mosquito netting and rubbed the one sheet.

"*Dua*," I said, and thus used one of my half dozen Malay words.

The boy shook his head.

"*Dua*," I repeated, and held up two fingers.

Again he shook his head.

"*Dua*," I insisted. "Two sheets. Go get them."

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

He stared, then went out of the room. A few minutes later he came back.

"*Tidak*," he said.

I knew enough Malay to understand that he had reported unfavorably, but I believed he hadn't understood, so I beckoned him to the bed, touched it, smoothed the sheet, and said, "*Dua, dua*," holding up two fingers. He shook his head and went away sorrowfully.

Ten minutes later I heard a most awful racket outside my room. I opened the door and saw four boys straining and sweating as they hoisted a second bedstead.

"*Tidak*," I shouted. "*Tidak*. Come here." I beckoned the head boy to me again. "*Dua*," I said, catching hold of the sheet. "*Dua*."

Again he stared, and shook his head, then in a flash his expression changed. "Ah!" he said. "Ah!" He bowed low and hurried from the room.

And a quarter of an hour later came a gentle knock at my door. I opened to see that the boy had erred a second time—a demure error with temple flowers coyly woven into hair.

. . .

During the entire time I have been in Java I have not seen a bathtub. Instead, in each bathing room is a great earthen jar or stone vat filled with water. Beside the vat hangs a half-gallon tin bucket. One stands upon the cement floor of the bathroom, dips

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

up buckets of water, and sloshes it upon himself. At first encounter such bathing appears entirely inadequate, but after some experience one becomes enamored of the scheme; indeed, I now splutter and gasp almost as loud as the fat Dutchman in the room next to mine.

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No house, indeed no room, in Java is complete without its bevy of barking lizards, each four inches long, half an inch wide, and colored a delicate pink. Usually they appear at twilight, scurrying about the ceiling and the upper part of the walls. Often in their rushing they stop to utter a series of quick, chirping barks, a sound admirably suggested by *tjitjak*, their name. One gets accustomed to them, for they are friendly enough and cause no trouble, except when from the ceiling they shed their tails upon the dinner table.

A traveler in the East gets rather *blasé* about flying, crawling things. In a hotel where I stopped not long ago I had the table boy begin each meal by sweeping away the insects that had died or were in the process of dying upon the tablecloth, silver, or bread and butter plate. As a meal progresses, one casually separates an Arthropoda from the *hors d'œuvres*, extracts a diving daddy-long-legs from the creamed spinach, and deftly defeats the boring activities of a black mite's assault upon the *blanc-mange*.

Last week I dined at the home of an American lady who has lived in Java for three years. During the meal, an insect with black body, striped red, tumbled

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

into the lady's claret. "Poor little chap," she said, fishing him out with a spoon. Later she finished the wine, paying no more attention to the bug than if he had been Cleopatra's pearl.

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At a street fair I saw a native doctor make up a prescription for a patient who crouched beside him. The medicine was chiefly cinnamon, ground pepper, and dust collected from the middle of the street, though over the pile the doctor scraped the backbone of a fish, a tiger's claw, the tusk of a boar, the skull of a cat, and the bone from the foreleg of a dog. Throughout the preparation the doctor chanted an unbroken series of charms, then wrapped the panacea in a newspaper and gave it to the patient, who paid four cents, his wages for half a day, and went away to take the medicine and enjoy the benefits therefrom.

The Javanese greatly distrust the white doctor and his treatments, preferring the methods and the magic of their fathers. They burn an open wound, heat a mother and newborn babe on a bench over a smoldering fire, cure leprosy by giving water in which the tail of Tjitjak the Lizard has been soaked, and combat impotency by hanging the genitals of a tiger above the bed.

The most popular doctors of Java are *peinter* women, wizened old dames celebrated for their dark wisdom, who haunt the public markets and pretend to know the cure for any ailment. They prescribe and

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

give pills, use salves, apply poultices; they know the power in charms, in certain precious stones, and in the urine and feces of man and of animals: white doctors are unable to compete with their sorcery, the native preferring their thaumaturgy and their vile prescriptions. . . .

One of the most interesting practices of the old women is to assist young ladies who pine for love. The lady approaches the doctor secretly, bringing with her a lock of the loved one's hair. Runes are recited over it and weakening drugs prepared. And yet sometimes, it is said, a man of Java is able to withstand both the lure of the lady and the effect of the drug. After this eccentric fact has been proved, the lady goes back to the old woman and reports failure. Straightway the wise one declares that only the mighty liquid drawn from the glands of the sea cow killed by harpoons off the island of Billiton can conquer such an unnatural man. She sells one drop of the seductive fluid; she charges one dollar.

But the next morning the lady returns, admitting that all night she tossed on her couch, unanswered. The wrinkled witch and the woman spurned then set about their mystic business. They make an image of the virtuous man and thrust pins into those parts of the body of which the lady is most jealous, most wants destroyed. This particular form of magic is not so effective as it was once, for the Dutch government no longer allows the old women and their helpers to lie

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

in wait and with sharp knives carry out the commission suggested by the incantations of their necromancy.

Another form of magic, long practiced in Java, is still entirely effective. *Guna guna* begins with the usual exorcisms and use of love potions, but if these fail, the conjuror prepares a slow death and sells it to the woman whose lover is more virtuous, or more weary, than wise. The woman administers it in small doses perfectly calculated to give prolonged and fascinating agonies. Usually the death is made up chiefly of ground glass, shredded bamboo fibers, or whiskers cut from a tiger and chopped fine.

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Long before I came to Java I heard travelers tell of *rijst-tafel*, the rice-table served only in Java. I was told I would have to try it. I did try it. I'll never do it again, for I felt as if I'd dined with Trimalchio.

The foundation is rice. It is shoveled into a bowl considerably larger than a soup plate. Over the rice one scatters a bit of mincemeat and vegetable curry. This is mushed about until it is sufficiently gummy. The serious business of serving the meal then gets under way. Forty boys stand in a line that curls across the room, and each boy carries a plate containing an ingredient supposed to play its succulent part in this glutton's delight.

There is chicken prepared in every known way. There are hen eggs and duck eggs, fresh eggs and century old eggs from China. There are nuts: whole,

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

chopped, salted, grated. Hunks of beef. Lumps of potatoes. Fried bananas. Fresh bananas. Cucumbers athwart cubes of bamboo shoots. Livers and gizzards spiced with fiery chilies. Shredded coconut. Flaked coconut. Fragments of sharks. Whole minnows. Fishes caught yesterday. Fishes from the nets of the Carthaginians.

The deluge continues until one's bowl becomes an esculent ark into which, two by two, have gone specimens of the flora and fauna of all places and all ages. When the serving is finally ended, one imitates the Dutch, and with audible and perspiratory evidence of enjoyment eats the rijst-tafel. Personally I was defeated by the world famous dish, for when only half through I bethought me of my bed—with warring sighs and groans I sought it.

. . .

In Batavia, the large port at the western extremity of the island, is a hellish monument the Dutch think best not to remove, desiring it forever to preach its gruesome sermon and play its part in changing the mind of any Javanese contemplating rebellion.

In 1722, the Dutch caught a half-caste conspiring to overthrow the government. They impaled him alive, broke him on the wheel, cut his head and hands off, quartered his body, smeared the head with plaster, and stuck it on a wall where it has remained to the present, this inscription beneath it: "As a reminder of the executed traitor, Pieter Elberfeld, none shall

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

be permitted to build in this spot in wood or stone, or to plant here, from this day forevermore."

Young Javanese whisper that the inscription is a lie, that some day they will build monuments to Javanese freedom upon the spot where Elberfeld's skull now goads them.

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In Java the Number One boy, a combination butler, major-domo, and head waiter, is paid eight dollars a month. Cook receives a similar sum. The chauffeur receives top salary of twenty dollars a month, with ten cents a day added for food. Footmen, laundresses, and second cooks get what they can, usually from three to five dollars a month. Out of these salaries the servants feed and clothe themselves, and still save enough to go on an occasional palm-wine drunk.

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Last week in Djocjakarta a Javanese girl gave me a manicure. I asked about native ladies calling upon her. She said she worked for no Javanese except princes and their children, for she disliked to shampoo the ordinary native's head. The Javanese are a cleanly people, bathing every day; but unfortunately they bathe in public canals where the water is dirty, sleep in rooms without ventilation, and on beds that are ancient mats: most natives are afflicted with lice.

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## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

I know a lot of people I'd like to have visit a certain barber shop in Java. I found the place yesterday. The sign over the door read: HAIR CUT—SHAVE—FACE MASSACRED.

## XII

**P**AKAE BOEWONO SENOPATI INGALOGO ABDUR RACHMAN SADJIDIN PANOTOGOMO the Tenth, Susuhunan of Surakarta, was my host at dinner last night. Perhaps you have dined at Buckingham Palace, or, before the great debacle, feasted with Kaiser, Emperor, or Czar, but I am not jealous, for last night I revelled with Pakae Boewono Senopati Ingalogo Abdur Rachman Sajidin Panotogomo the Tenth, Susuhunan of Surakarta. . . .

Many years ago, so Javanese children are told, lived a ruler named Kyahi Ageng Mataram, whose wealth could not be counted. One day a prophet came and prophesied before him, saying: "Your kingdom, O king, shall become the most powerful in all Java and you shall rule the realm." Straightway Kyahi Ageng Mataram forsook his garments of gold, his throne of ivory, and went into the forest to live as a hermit and to pray for the speedy fulfillment of the words of the seer. In the forest he met a man who spent his days tapping coconut trees and making sugar from the sap. The ruler slept his first night away from the palace at the home of this man.

Next morning the laborer set forth with his bamboo jars to collect the sap of the coconut trees. For

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

a time all his work was as usual; then, as he was taking down a full jar and putting an empty one in its place, a voice spoke to him, saying: "Whoever shall drink my milk to the last drop shall sire the princes destined to rule all Java." The laborer doubted his ability to drink all the milk; so he hastened home with the jar, left it and its dynastic fluid in the custody of his wife, then returned to his work in the forest.

In the middle of the morning Kyahi Ageng Mataram awakened from his sleep, declared his great thirst, and drank the coconut milk to the last drop. Thus it was destined that from his loins should come the rulers of Java. In 1622 the prophecy was fulfilled, for in that year his successor was declared Sultan of all Java.

Fifty-five years later a group of discontented Chinese rebelled. Dutch soldiers helped the sultan put down the uprising and as payment for their help they demanded and took such privileges that the power of Kyahi Ageng Mataram's successors became identical with that of Indian chiefs living to-day on American reservations. Immediately the Dutch took control, they set about making themselves masters of Java. At present their rule of the island is absolute. The more fateful Javanese declare the famous coconut milk was slightly curdled.

Yet the Dutch have governed so cleverly that the Sultan of Djocjakarta still calls himself "The Ruler of the World." The Susuhunan with whom I dined last night is saluted as "Axis of the Universe," and

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

the town of Surakarta, over which he rules, is known as "Most Excellent Town of Heroes in the World." When the Susuhunan heard of the Kaiser's flight he sorrowfully remarked: "Alas, alas—the Emperor of Austria is dead, the Czar of the Russians has been murdered, the Kaiser has abdicated; only I am left."

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In the center of Java are two native states with nominal absolute-rulers. The Sultan of Djocjakarta and the Susuhunan of Surakarta have, on paper, the combined powers of Ghenghis Khan, the Pope of Rome, and the chief of a tribe in the Australian bush. The Dutch, in public, encourage this illusion, and they have been so subtle in their usurpation of power that most natives still believe themselves ruled by their sultans. Even the sultans, so shrewd are their overlords, are duped into believing that they actually govern.

The Dutch, great colonizers as they are, know that children are kept quiet by toys and baubles and brilliant colors and the blast of trumpets: the native rulers are allowed, even encouraged, to maintain courts which in splendor and pomp and ceremony shame the courts of Europe.

Three days ago the Susuhunan of Surakarta had a birthday. He was sixty-four years old, and, according to custom, he ordered that an elaborate fête be held; especially elaborate this year, because at thirty-two, sixty-four, and ninety-six is not a man especially blessed? Then, too, for these festivities were coming

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

the Crown Prince and Princess of the Belgians, who were visiting the island while on a tour of the world. Furthermore, though at the Susuhunan's original planning he had been unaware of this, there was coming Childers of Birmingham, Alabama.

Exactly how I obtained invitations to the various functions, I have no desire to confess—it is not my wish to make Capone jealous—but the invitations were obtained, and with them came the unsettling announcement: "You will present yourself in evening dress." I couldn't present myself in evening dress, for I had left my tail coat in Singapore, not dreaming of needing it in Java. I hurried to the tailor. He had none to rent. I went to the pawnshops. They had none. The hotel waiters were of no use to me, because they are natives and wear native costumes. Early in the afternoon I had an inspiration. I went back to the tailor and asked him to rig out some false tails and attach them to the rear of my dinner jacket. The tailor was a Dutchman. He said it couldn't be done.

I went to the hotel, got my dinner jacket, and bought four quarts of whisky. I returned to the tailor and for one hour we argued and drank. Then he saw the light. For two hours we drank and sewed tails on my dinner jacket. One tail was longer than the other and both were lopsided. But I had tails. I was ready to dine with the assembled kings of history, and the tailor swore he could sew a tail on a Manx cat.

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

At seven-fifteen, exactly to the minute, an American-made automobile entered the *kraton*, the palace of the Susuhunan of Surakarta. Within the car sat an official of the Dutch government, a Javanese regent, a tiny yellow umbrella on top of the radiator cap proclaiming his rank, and an American gentleman whose coat-tails were slightly askew.

Inside the outer square, we stepped from the car and climbed five broad steps of marble. At the end of a long winding passage, brilliantly lighted, we entered the resplendent throne room of the Susuhunan. This inner sanctum, in the center of a great open air court, is one hundred feet square. Four steps lead up to its solid marble floor. The ceiling, from which hang twenty golden candelabra, is supported by teak columns thirty feet high. There are no walls.

On three sides of the great dais stood the Susuhunan's army, sixty soldiers arrayed in coats of red and gold, gaudy batik trousers, and no shoes. Their guns were muzzle loaders. In front of each company stood a small ten-year-old boy in a black uniform streaked with gold, a white plume waving atop his hat, his little spine stiff as the sword he held erect before him. The boys were three of the Susuhunan's sons.

Strolling about the throne room were hundreds of Javanese noblemen and gentlemen. Each man wore a highly polished hat of black leather that had no brim; it looked like a flowerpot resting upon the long hair knotted at the back of the head. Their jackets of red

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

and black were adorned with gold and hung with medals. At the left hip swung the short Javanese sword and in the belt at the back was thrust the *kris*, the native dagger. Gorgeous skirts of brightly colored cloth were caught up at the waist and draped from there in three loops, partly covering the loose silken trousers of brilliant designs. Every man was barefooted, for no native is allowed to wear shoes in the presence of the Susuhunan. These men who strolled about the throne room, smoking and chatting, were sons, ministers, courtiers, retainers. They are a few of the five thousand males living within the palace. One does not see the royal goldsmiths and silver-smiths, the armorers, carpenters, masons, priests, wood-carvers, and serving men.

To one side, within a great enclosure, a solid mass of women squatted shoulder to shoulder and knees to small of back, covering the ground like a swarm of yellow grasshoppers. They are the female attendants, a few of the ten thousand women living within the palace.

. . .

A fanfare!

The guard swings its muskets upward in the royal salute!

The Javanese crouch upon their heels!

His Highness, the Susuhunan, enters!

He is short and fat. His black velvet coat blazes with its covering of diamond-studded decorations. His

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

scarlet hose show between the bottom of his purple sarong and his pumps of black satin. He walks slowly and with great dignity. The Emperor of Austria is dead. The Czar of the Russians has been murdered. The Kaiser has abdicated. Only he is left.

With her hand through his arm walks a woman of startling beauty, small, delicate, fragile: Titania in topaz. Her silken sarong is cream colored, and has a conventional design of minute brown squares; her linen shirt waist is white. Into her ears are thrust cone-shaped Javanese earrings, their bases flashing solid with diamonds; into her ebony hair are twined two temple flowers of yellow. She is the Number One wife.

Immediately behind the Susuhunan marches a female dwarf, distorted and hideous, bearing the royal spittoon, of gold and wondrously carved. Behind her marches the bearer of the royal sword. Then the bearer of the golden duck. The bearer of the golden spear. The bearer of the golden shield. Then come the princesses, marching in a long line, two by two. They are unnumbered, for if you ask the Susuhunan the number of his children he replies that he is the father of sixty-eight sons.

The guests at the birthday party advance along the royal carpet of red stretching from the steps to the throne. They are presented to the Susuhunan. He grants his hand, a palm with five pegs of jewels jutting from it; even in a momentary grip one feels the two-

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

inch nails. The Susuhunan expresses his greetings in Malay.

Her Highness smiles graciously. She, too, grants her hand. She murmurs softly, speaking in Javanese, the most musical of all Oriental languages.

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A fanfare!

The guard swings its muskets upward in the royal salute!

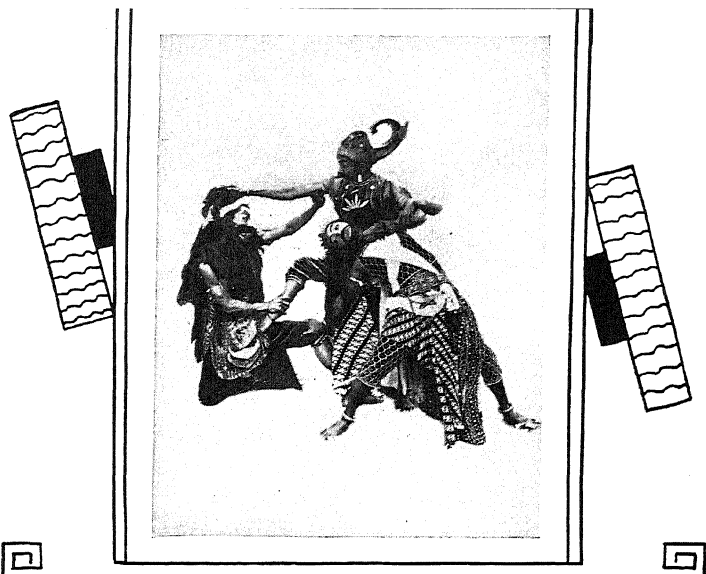
The Susuhunan leaves his throne and alone marches slowly forward!

Their Highnesses, the Crown Prince and Princess of the Belgians, and His Excellency, the Dutch governor, enter!

The lesser play begins—

To one side of the throne room is the Javanese orchestra, the *gamelan*. It is composed of gongs, bamboo xylophones, hand-drums, and the *rabab*, the two-string viol with shrill, piercing tone. The music is especially strange to western ears, for it lacks the fourth and the seventh and all semitones. Three native women sing in high-pitched, nasal voices.

At opposite sides of the throne room two green velvet curtains are parted and the actors enter. They salute the Susuhunan, then advance to the center of the space reserved for them. There the two columns face each other, thus designating the opposing forces in the drama. Once the separation is completed, the



### JAVANESE DANCERS

*Top: In the dramas of Java, the actors unfold the story by dancing slowly, with elaborate balance and counterpoise.*

*Lower left: Son of one of the native rulers, this man is reputed to be the finest dancer in Java.*

*Lower right: A Javanese hero makes ready to slay the villain!*



## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

actors strike poses and stare before them. The players have their bodies smeared with ochre. What little clothing they wear is of batik. Their many ornaments are of gold and fine gems. The headdress of one is a cupola woven from golden fibers; of another, polished buffalo horns; a third wears a white skullcap that drops a repulsive mask.

The music softens. A man seated cross-legged before the orchestra strikes a sharp blow upon a wooden gong at his feet. He chants the story of the play, telling what is to happen. When he has finished, the music quickens. The actors begin to dance the drama. With amazing slowness, with elaborate and involved balance and counterpoise, they unfold the story.

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During the intermission a buffet supper was served. The first course was Heinz canned spaghetti. The drinks ranged from Johnny Walker, Red and Black label, to champagne. After coffee, the guests wandered about the grounds of the palace. But I didn't wander far, because I was fascinated by the charming way the little barefooted princesses chewed tobacco. Javanese tobacco is shredded and the royal maidens roll it into six-inch lengths, putting one inch between their teeth and their lower lip, allowing the other five inches to protrude. Slowly they chew it in.

Immediately after supper, the ten thousand female attendants left The Presence. They are virtuous

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

women, all of them. Whenever the royal physician informs the Susuhunan that one of the court ladies is to become a mother, the Susuhunan divorces one of his four legal wives, marries the lady, and the child is born in holy wedlock. The Susuhunan hears of the event, sends the baby a toy, divorces the mother, and takes back the wife he prefers.

At the end of the intermission, the Susuhunan once more mounted his throne of gold. Stolidly he gazed out at his guests and at his people. Around him were his sons, his daughters, his retainers. Behind him squatted the dwarf of the twisted body, holding the royal spittoon. In other parts of the palace waited his wives and his concubines.

That morning one of the Dutch overlords had approached the Susuhunan. "Your Highness," the Dutchman said, "a pair of slippers has been ordered for Her Highness."

"Well?"

"All but a few inches of the satin has been stolen by your retainers."

"Well?"

"True, Your Highness, your income from your rice fields and your sugar plantations is a million and a half gold dollars a year, but this stealing, Your Highness, is—"

"Enough! They are my people. If not from me, then from whom must they steal?"

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

It is two o'clock!

The lesser play is ended!

A fanfare!

The guard swings its muskets upward in the royal salute!

The Javanese crouch upon their heels!

The Susuhunan leaves the throne, and, accompanied by his royal guests, marches slowly forward.

Their Highnesses, the Crown Prince and Princess of the Belgians, and His Excellency, the Dutch Governor of Surakarta, are departing.

Pakae Boewono Senopati Ingalogo Abdur Rachman Sajidin Panotogomo the Tenth, Susuhunan of Surakarta, has celebrated his sixty-fourth birthday.

### XIII

FROM Canton in China, my dear Mac, through Indo-China, Siam, the Malay peninsula, and Java, are great splotches like blood upon pavement and stone; they are the spittle of *areca*-nut chewers.

In the Andes the Indians chew cocoa, in West Africa the blacks have their chewing stick, the Arabs of Yemen are addicts of *ghat*-chewing, in Europe and in America men and women chew tobacco, and in the United States unfortunate neurotics chew gum. The Oriental satisfies the ecumenical craving by chewing the *areca*-nut wrapped in a leaf of the *betel*-vine.

Everywhere in the East one sees the colorful mastication, the natives forever mouthing the nut and spitting the red saliva. Priests at Angkor splatter the causeway with their crimson spitting. Attendants at the royal palace in Cambodia have left old splashes, now colored maroon, upon the ancient stairway. Siamese soldiers splotch the pavements of Bangkok. The scarlet spots are everywhere upon stone, cement, and asphalt; they freckle the East.

An *areca*-nut addict begins his chewing by taking into his mouth a mixture of equal parts of lime and gambier, a vegetable astringent, which tastes like green persimmon and sets up a burning best allayed by the slow crunching of the *areca*-nut. The nut has

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

a musty, soothing, rather pleasant taste which is made even more pleasant by the burning induced by the lime and gambier. After the chewer has tired of the nut, he spits out the fragments, then chews shredded tobacco to clean his teeth.

Every Oriental host south of China offers areca-nut to his guests, passing it as cigars are passed in the West. And as the nut is given out, a servant places a brass spittoon for each person. The individual spittoon is as common in the Orient as the individual ash tray in the Occident.

Doctors of the East differ in their opinions about areca-nut chewing, some believing that the introduction of lime into the mouth preserves the teeth, others insisting that the nut is conducive to Rigg's disease, eventually causing cancer of the mouth. About the relative merits of these medical opinions I know nothing, but I do know that the mouth of the betel-chewer is a thing of horror. Both men and women begin the habit in their teens; in a short time their teeth turn crimson, and, as they chew, which is most of the time, their red saliva sloshes out over their chins and slides slowly down. The teeth of old chewers are black; and black teeth, with thick red juice oozing around them, are not pretty.

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In the zoo at Sourabaya I saw a bird of paradise. He sat high above me and his plumage dreamed upon the air like golden shadows.

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

In the spring, when his thoughts turn to love, the bird of paradise goes forth to display himself. He and fifteen or twenty of his comrades assemble. They strut upon the branch of a large tree, raising the resplendent plumes that grow from their shoulders, and each bird from out an aura of gold casts an amorous eye. But like man, like bird; while the mating dance goes on, the ultimate jest is played.

The natives discover the tree chosen for the love rites. They hide beneath it. With blunt arrows, so that no blood may stain the plumes, they shoot the prancing male. The doomed bird falls. And so sweet is the power of love that the birds who dance pay no heed to the birds that fall. One by one they are all shot down from the branch of love into the serene oblivion of death. And their blind bow-boy is a naked man with blunt arrows.

What a death! How glorious to go to one's death when one is young, with plumage spread, astrut upon the path of love. What a death! For me, I think the natives do the birds a mighty favor.

. . .

In the Sourabaya zoo are dwarf deer, smallest of all creatures with the split hoof, marked as the ordinary spotted-tail deer, yet with a body no larger than a house cat's and legs the length and diameter of a lead pencil; giant lizards, hideous brutes six and seven feet long, weighing three to four hundred pounds; and a monster bat, a filthy looking fellow as large as a month-

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

old puppy. There are, I believe, other strange creatures in this zoo, but the keeper caught me flipping pebbles in the crocodile's mouth.

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One of the most laudable services the Dutch are rendering the Javanese is to control the pawnshops of the island.

The money lender is probably the greatest economic curse of the East. Thousands of Chinese and Hindus have grown fat and fabulously wealthy by lending money at robbery rates, some of them charging as high as fifty per cent a month. There is no possible way for authorities to curb such thieving, though the Dutch have tried to lessen the evil by themselves lending money at a fair rate, catering especially to the poor man, the native afraid to attempt negotiating a petty loan at a bank, even if he understood the Western system of borrowing.

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A few nights ago I was in a cabaret in Sourabaya. At two o'clock in the morning a Dutch gentleman rolled in, announcing that he would give an exhibition of juggling. He would begin, he declared, by juggling a table, the snare drum, and a dancing girl. He had collected the table and the girl, and was raising a row about the drum, when his friends finally quieted him.

They led him from his ambition and put him in a

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

corner where he soon relapsed into a heavy-headed comatose prelude of drunken slumber; then they left him and went about their dancing. They were across the room when suddenly he reared himself and in a voice like Thor's hammer proclaimed his intention of whipping nine men. He bellowed his defiance, shook off his friends, and began to swing wildly.

A little Dutch lady who had received her training in Paris and who was managing the cabaret walked up to him. One instant the drunk's face was an ordinary face; then madame stroked it, a downward slashing stroke—his left cheek, speaking mildly, was divided. His friends caught him as he staggered back. They dragged him out, a gory spectacle.

The little lady in green went back to her table, sipped her wine, and casually cut another notch in her scoreboard. I was told that with that particular diamond ring she had rid her place of seventeen brawlers.

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When a Javanese bride first goes to the home of her husband, she is accompanied by an older woman who foretells events, offers advice and gives suggestions, then leads the bride into the bridal chamber, and from there retires quickly to hurry to waiting friends and tell them the exact minute the bride went to her husband.

The friends wait for one hour, then storm the room of the married couple, smashing doors, breaking windows, and rushing in with torches, thus driving away

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

evil spirits that have assembled and jealously watched the endearments of the young couple.

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Pigs in the East are shipped in individual containers, cylindrical baskets of woven bamboo, that fit the pig's body. He is shoved in head first, then the back end of the basket is fastened behind him. On top is a handle; a man carries a pig as he would carry a traveling bag.

It is my honest belief that Eastern pigs are more acutely odoriferous than their American cousins, though this belief may have been inspired by a recent trip on a freight boat carrying a cargo of pigs. The porkers in their baskets were loaded forward, stacked one upon the other like logs, while for three days and three nights the ship sailed slowly into a warm and gentle head wind.

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The trip on this particular freighter ended in excitement. On board were an English army officer and his wife. When we were four hours from port the lady suddenly collapsed with intense pain. There was no doctor on board. There was no wireless.

At eleven o'clock one morning we sailed into a Javanese harbor and were met by the harbor pilot in his launch. The pilot lent me the launch, and the ship's captain gave me permission to go ashore. I was carried full speed to the office of the harbor master and there telephoned the British consul, telling him that

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

a ship carrying a British lady dangerously ill would be docked in fifteen minutes. I requested that he meet the ship with an ambulance and a doctor. He said he would do his best, but the day was a holiday and he couldn't tell how quickly assistance could be brought.

One hour and twenty minutes after the ship docked, a Dutch doctor and an ambulance arrived at the pier. The lady, fortunately, was still living.

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There is something, Mac, a little holy about the part of the world in which I'm traveling now. For years Conrad traded in these islands; many of his stories are laid here. I shall always remember my feeling when the first native called me *Tuan*. They called Jim by that name—Tuan Jim, which means "Lord Jim."

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In the middle of every bed in Java is a Dutch widow, a bolster three feet long and ten inches wide, over which one is supposed to cast a leg and thus allow the air to circulate more freely. Since coming to the island I've repeatedly pushed the thing out of bed, but last night was so beastly hot that I was willing to try anything, even a sawdust widow. And, credit where credit is due, the bolster is certainly cooling, though one has to be something of a contortionist to sleep with it.

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## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

Last week I met an old Dutchman who for years has lived in Java: I asked him about the native's running *amok*, the homicidal mania which suddenly comes over a Javanese or a Malay and sends him forth to kill. The old man told me that the occurrence was far less common than imaginative writers have made the Western world believe.

"Though," he said, "it sometimes happens. I have seen it once. I saw one man run amok, and I never want to see another. This wretched fellow raced along the village street, his naked kris in his hand, and before the police could overcome him he stabbed one man and almost cut the head off another.

"Few persons," the old Dutchman went on, "understand why a Javanese runs amok. The popular belief is that the native suddenly, and for no reason, goes completely wild, draws his kris and stabs every one within reach. This is not true. Running amok is not a lightning decision to commit murder, but is a sudden and uncontrollable expression of prolonged hatred.

"The Javanese are an exceedingly courteous and kindly people, polite, ceremonious, and strictly observant of their *adat*, their unwritten laws of behavior. They are, too, excessively sensitive, and they never forget. If a Javanese has been insulted, even though the insult was offered by one who unknowingly broke some law of *adat*, the Javanese may instantly bare his kris and immediately seek to avenge the affront; or he may wait, go his way for weeks, months, even years, and forever brood. He has been dishonored. His

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

dignity has been despised. His manhood has been disregarded. All these things he tells himself, day and night musing over them, until inevitably they drive him mad, and when they do he draws his kris and goes forth to kill.

"Yet it should be understood that a native running amok is seeking only the person who insulted him, desiring to kill only this person, though unhesitatingly he will kill any one intentionally or accidentally crossing his path. Most villages sound a special gong when a man is running amok; sensible people then get indoors and stay there, leaving the killer to the police."

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It is decreed by ancient custom that a Javanese ruler shall sleep at night with his Number One wife; all night and every night it is her privilege to lie beside him.

The day is different, for the day belongs entirely to the ruler; he may disport himself as he wills. Whenever he desires diurnal companionship, he sends for his Number One wife and notifies her of his wishes.

Instantly the good woman hies her to the harem and there summons the thrice-blessed lady named by the sacred lips of the master.

Quickly the chosen one is surrounded by her envious sisterhood, each of whom twits the lady, yet assists in dressing her in garments conducive to love. The Number One wife is especially diligent in preparing the lady-about-to-be-exalted, weaving temple flowers,

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

anointing with perfumes and sweet oils, placing rare jewels, and, so 'tis said, frequently bending over to whisper cunning counsel, giving freely of her knowledge of the ways and whims of their lord.

## XIV

AND if I never get home, Dad, address my mail to Bali, a small island lying an overnight sail from the eastern tip of Java.

It was to Bali that Shelley set out to sail in his little boat. Byron was looking for Bali when he went to Greece. Keats stopped too soon: in Bali he would have found his fairyland forlorn. Plato wrote of Bali and called it "The Republic"; Sir Thomas More called it "Utopia"; Bacon called it "New Atlantis." Southey and Coleridge were thinking of Bali when they planned their settlement on the Susquehanna. The Transcendentalists and Robert Owen and William Morris all envisioned Bali.

The dream of all dreamers has been of a fertile land tilled by a contented people, a society of primitive simplicity in which the individual and the group are spiritually and economically benefited. Such a dream is a reality in Bali. In Bali, man carries on the business of living with just enough work to remain economically independent, physically and mentally sturdy. The rest of the time he is dancing under the trees, or playing in the village orchestra, or bathing in a clear pool, or making love to some pretty girl who lives exactly the same life as he. I have found in Bali that even a traveler can fill his lungs and stretch himself.

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

Bali is only a speck of an island, a hundred miles long and fifty miles across, but a million men and women live there, and I envy them the simplicity of their lives and the serenity of their souls; there is no neurasthenia in Bali. Wealth is so equally divided that there is no poverty and no man is the servant of another. There is little illness, no political jealousy, no committee to care for public and private morals, no Sunday. Each man has his own bit of soil and works it with his own hands, raising enough rice to feed his family and to barter for the few essentials he can not make for himself. He wears only a piece of cloth, and sometimes he forgets to put it on. He is ignorant of the laws of convention and free from stultifying mental and spiritual domination: he is his own priest, taking his turn in serving before the altar.

At times, even while I am here, I believe there is no Bali. It doesn't exist. It can't exist. Surely there is no place where one still sees the cloven footprint of the greatest of all the gods, of him whom steeples and machines and dollars have banished. And then at night, when I sit and listen, I know there *is* a place called Bali. And I know that on this little island in the Pacific the Great God Pan has found his home. I know, because on the mountain tops, beside the streams, above the tones of the village orchestra, I hear the quick melody of his reed pipe.

## XV

ANNETTE, dear, come live with me and be my love—in Bali. In Bali we can all the pleasures prove. Here are dancing and singing, and men and women with flowers in their hair. On this island grows the lotus. Here one learns what songs the sirens sang; he hears them every night sung by girls whose uncovered breasts gleam in the light of the lamps like little golden domes. For the first time I have found the potentiality of contentment. Why should I give it up to come back to alarm clocks and telephones?

For an instant I am serious, and yet even as I ask the question, I know the answer: I am a white man. The blessed life of these island people is not for me; my color and my heritage forbid. In another year I shall be twelve thousand miles from the serenity of Bali, back in the roar and the rush of my own country, a country truly fine, but that is restless and fatiguing.

My first sight of Bali was from the deck of a little ship. We anchored in the roadstead off shore from the town of Boeleng. Town! There are hundreds of coconut palms, and a dozen houses with thatched roofs where the natives live, and a dozen houses with corrugated iron where the Dutchmen trade.

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

A *prahu*, paddled by six Balinese and swaying up and down with the sea, drew alongside the ship. I stepped into it. The *prahu* turned and went slowly toward the shore. For a hundred yards we rose and fell with the breathing of the sea, then the men saw a breaker coming in; shouting, they drove their paddles deep, carrying us in upon the swell.

The wave receded. The keel of the *prahu* struck upon the sand. The little brown men sprang into the water. Four of them braced themselves and swung on the bow. Two of them crossed their wrists. They made a pack-saddle level with the gunwale. With the breakers beating and crashing about the boat, I was told to face the sea and blindly drop backward. I did. The two Balinese caught me. They staggered through the breakers and let me down upon the beach.

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Bali's original inhabitants were Polynesians, but in the fifteenth century Hindus came from Java because the sword of Islam was obeying the precept of the Prophet and driving all unbelievers before it. The Hindus of Java, fleeing before the wrath of Mohammedanism, invaded Bali and established their religion, customs, and government upon the island. The Hindu influence is still paramount.

In the sixteenth century the Portuguese visited Bali, and late in the same century Cornelius Van Houtman stopped there for supplies. After he returned home he told about the place; the Dutch became interested. For

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

two hundred and fifty years they watched it; in 1855 they took it, establishing a government and decreeing that all native rulers must submit. One ruler would not. His refusal began a war that could have only one end, but that end is a magnificent chapter in the book not yet written about the white man's politely-called "colonization" of the East.

In the year 1908 Holland decided definitely to end the petty war. She sent her battleships through the coral reefs guarding the harbor of Den Pasar, and she told the captain of ships, and the captain of gunners that the Rajah of Badoeng must bow to the might of Holland—of little Holland.

In his throne room the Rajah received word that the white man had landed, that his cannon were making ready to attack. The echo of the message was the bursting of shells above the palace. The Rajah looked up at the sky. He saw smoke that dirtied the heavens. He heard the big noises that disturbed his peace; and he smiled.

An hour later the gates of the palace swung open and the Dutchmen saw the entry of those actors who had well learned their parts in the epic of *poepoetan*. High upon the shoulders of chosen bearers sat the gilded chair, and within the chair, his arms folded, his festive robes turning the brilliance of the tropic sun, sat the Rajah. About him marched his people, his soldiers, courtiers, priests. With the men, marched the women. Erect and glorious, the people of the Rajah marched toward the Dutch soldiers, and in their hair

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

were bright flowers, and in their hands were bright knives with blades that gleamed like gold.

The captain of the Dutch gunners gave the command, and again the heavens were sullied; again the man-thunder rolled. The Rajah smiled. The festival was about to begin. He unfolded his arms, reached behind him, and drew his golden kris. His wives looked up to him, pleading; and he answered their prayer. Like the tongue of a golden serpent, the kris struck and struck and struck—one little slit of red in each huddled brown body with festive garments bright in the sun, and flowers still fresh.

As the Rajah struck, so struck his people. His soldiers cut down their women, and with his holy kris the priest administered the last service. When all others were dead, the Rajah, and the soldiers, and the priests, looked at each other, smiled, and then there was nothing—only limp hands upon hilts of buried kris.

Nobly, little Holland was bearing her portion of the white man's burden.



At present Bali is governed exactly as the states of Surakarta and Djocjakarta are governed: a native ruler has a Dutchman as "father," and while the ruler has all the pomp and ceremony and wives he wants, the Dutchman has all the power.

Holland is probably the smartest colonizer of all peoples who have plundered the more unenlightened parts of the earth, those parts not blessed with the

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

machine gun; for Holland, as much as she possibly can, leaves Bali to the Balinese, knowing that such treatment makes for contentment, lessens the possibility of rebellion and fighting, and, most important of all, assures good dividends. There are other reasons why Bali is still the land of its native people; the chief of them is that the Dutch have been so busy with their intense exploitation of Java that they haven't got around to the smaller island. Soon, though, Dutch business men will call for new lands. Bali lies in the path of their trade. Undoubtedly it will be gobbled by commerce.

But until that maw is opened, I should like to live in Bali. Here with the sound of the village orchestra in my ears and the sight of the village dancers in my eyes, here for the first time I have not laughed when thinking of man as captain of his soul.



The first person to greet me in Bali was Patimah.

The Balinese have always burned their dead, and, until the Dutch stopped the practice, the body of the man was followed into the fire by his living wives. Less than a century ago seventy-two women flung themselves into the flames that burned the body of a rajah. This supreme proof of grief is now forbidden. To-day a Balinese widow attends the funeral of her husband, then returns to her home or to the home of her parents.

But Patimah is older than the island's freedom from suttee. When she was a little child she was seen by a rajah: he took her and made her one of a hundred

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wives, keeping her in his palace where she, a queen, danced for him and answered his every want. Then the rajah sickened and died. His people moaned; his widows made ready to give themselves to the flames.

Patimah looked at the sun, smelled the frangipani that lay in her hair, felt the ripple of muscles in her strong young body—why should she die? Why should she give all her gifts to the fire? At midnight she stole from the palace. Alone, she fled across the island and put herself under the protection of the Dutch.

The next day the body of the rajah was cremated. His queens fulfilled their duties and cast themselves upon the pyre. And after the flames had finished, men gathered the ashes and carried them out to sea and scattered them upon the restless waters that surround the island.

Patimah, alive in the Dutch fort, heard that her sister queens had died nobly, true to the royal custom. She looked at the sun. She drew the frangipani from her hair and smelled it.

That was twenty-five years ago.

To-day Patimah is a wealthy woman. She has made money by trading in cloth and beaten silver. She owns her home. Barefooted, she drives a Buick automobile. I have sat with her on the veranda of her house, drinking the thick coffee of the island and talking with her about Bali and its people. But always we talked of the present. Patimah has forgotten the past. I have hinted at happenings in other years, suggesting an eagerness to know of Patimah the Queen, Patimah be-

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

fore she became a trader in cloth and silver, but Patimah, never understanding, looks away and says nothing, refusing to tell her thoughts as she drives her automobile over old ashes brought back by the sea.

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The Balinese soul is very chary and does not rush into the body of a baby the instant the baby is born. Instead, it waits and watches. If the baby behaves, and is properly baptized, the soul moves in; it gives baby a trial.

All Balinese mothers know these facts about souls, and they know, too, that the unsettled soul can be easily offended; so they take infinite care to placate it. They enertain their babies and keep them happy, for that, as every one should know, is the way to make the soul happy. They feed baby on finest food, because the soul is excessively fond of fruits and white meat of chicken and sweetened rice cakes. Furthermore, Balinese mothers know that baby must be treated with absolute respect. Such an indignity as a spanking would be certain to offend the soul; then the soul would withdraw and go elsewhere.

For hours I have watched the babies of Bali. They come forth, gloriously attired in a bracelet or two, riding astride sister's hip. After they are put down, they race about and play; no one pays any attention to them. They never cry. They never fight. They never make filthy squally little beasts of themselves. Even a bachelor can love them.

## XVI

I HEARD the throb, throb of drums. I heard the trembling, golden overtone of gongs struck in harmony. It was the *gamelan*. The men of Den Pasar were playing in their *banjar*, their club house, a thatched roof resting upon four corner poles.

I heard the gamelan and I left the veranda of the rest house and went out into the soft rain of the tropic night; I went to the banjar. High caste men were playing. Coolies were playing. Women and children and little babies squatted at the shadow's edge. They made me welcome, passing me the areca-nut and the betel leaf. I took my place and listened as the men of Den Pasar played upon strange instruments, as reverently they reared a palace of manifold music.

Bronze gongs, as tall as a boy, swung between supports of teakwood carved like buffalo horns curving outward. Smaller gongs, and smaller gongs, swung between their uprights. Gongs like inverted bowls, with a nipple in the middle, sat upon racks. Bronze bars rested upon bamboo sounding chambers. Alto bells hung downward. Double-headed drums lay across the drummers' folded knees.

Upon the ground the musicians formed the side of a twelve-foot square. Dreamy-eyed they sat, and

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chewed the areca-nut, and played music no one had taught them, music never written down. That day they had worked knee-deep in the mud of the rice fields. That night they had come to their banjar to play the music of their fathers. Boys of ten played beside withered old men of eighty. Occasionally some one tired and went away; immediately some one else took his place.

The players struck the *gangsas*. They struck the *trompong*, the *reyong*, the *jejog*, the *joblag*, the *jalung*. The music murmured and was no more; then softly it came back and sang its song of yearning. It sank to a whisper of love and in dream tones told the ancient story. And suddenly it laughed in triumph. In quick melodies it went dancing over the fields of Den Pasar.

Then the bars of bronze were stilled, the alto bells were silenced, and there was only a giant gong trembling out its lingering death; a small boy leaned his naked shoulder against it. All was still, save the soft symphony of the tropic rain melting through the palm trees. Their eyes fixed upon the center of the square, the musicians were figures molded in heavy bronze, sitting in a silence that pressed against my eardrums.

The crash of the orchestra shattered the stillness. And in the center of the square was a boy, slow plumes from the bird of paradise floating from his purple turban, his shirt and scarf green like young grass, his sarong trailing behind him, red, like a cloth of blood with molten gold dropped on it. He crouched upon his

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

knees and his left arm was rigid behind him, his right arm rigid before him, while his right hand, quivering ceaselessly, held a silken fan. . . .

The gamelan is playing. Surely something is wrong. There are only five notes in this octave. The second and the sixth are missing. The octave is not an octave. It is flat. It is sharp. My ears cringe from it. I cry out inwardly that the pitch is wrong. The sound lashes my ear. Silently I plead for them to stop. Yet they play on.

There is no passion, no sustained theme; only phrases woven together, and unwoven, and subtly woven together again. This music is Bach. Bach at his organ weaving his intricate fugues. It is not Bach. There is something lacking. There is something added.

They play on, little hammers flying over bars of bronze, little sticks rapping the nipples of the gangsas, drummers fluttering their fingers against double-headed drums. I listen, and there are no gangsas, no trompong, no reyong. I hear only an ensemble. My ears no longer cringe. And the men of Den Pasar play on.

Arabesques of tone they make, curious patterns that take shape, then melt away, and other patterns take their place, and other patterns. It is a theme! A theme! I clutch for it, and it is gone—only another phrase coming out of the tropic night and quickly returning whence it came.

The song of the gamelan is all in a minor key. It passes before me like a musical shadow. How could I have thought it sharp or flat? I drag myself back. I

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

tell myself I am beneath a thatched roof in Den Pasar. I listen again. It is sharp. It is flat. My ear swears it is flat.

The music swells: there is neither sharp nor flat. There is only tone. I float on tone. The grandeur of it. The glory of it. The eternal choir is singing in a minor key, and I am drunk with tone and with rhythm driving through my head, hammering in my blood. Is that why my head is throbbing?

Always the fan of the boy dancer quivers and always he crouches upon folded legs. Only the upper part of his body moves. Like green snakes his arms writhe their sinuous way, their motion never beginning and never ending. His hands dream through the air. His hands dart.

The music crashes; full the trompongs, full the joblags, full the jalungs. Arms are still. Shoulders still. Only the head is motion. It jerks from side to side; jerks where the spinal column enters the skull. I see it, jerking there before me.

The gamelan breaks into a diapason. The boy writhes in rhythm. His hands dream. His hands dart. Ceaselessly the fan quivers. . . .

Cracked a mighty chord! It was strangled at birth. The music ended. The boy was a boy once more. My fingers tried to open. There was a fleck of red on my lower lip. I got up. I went out. Rain was falling.

## XVII

**I**N marriage, the Balinese prove their consummate wisdom. What a delightful farce-comedy they play every time they marry! The chief actors enjoy it, the audience of village folk enjoys it, and I suspect that the Balinese god of love enjoys it in his own godly way. How charmingly the married ones live together! How pleasantly they divorce!

A boy and a girl meet each other at the temple. Their eyes bridge the chasm. Later they meet at work in the rice field. Perhaps their hands may touch. It is enough; it is the beginning of the play.

The boy waits until he is ready; then one day he seizes the girl and flees through the village with her. She puts up a mighty fight, screams, kicks, pounds the head of the man carrying her. But the young lover knows his part well; it has been played by his father and his father's father, and he will not be denied. He takes the girl to his own home or to a house in a village nearby.

While the abduction is going on, the father of the girl carefully looks the other way, hearing nothing, seeing nothing; but once he is sure that his daughter is safely stolen, he makes his entrance with a howl. Where is she? Who has dared take her from him?

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

He will see the blood of the man who has touched his daughter. Oh, he knows his part! He has learned it from thousands of fathers. He struts about, and enjoys the strutting. He swears his kris is hungry for the flesh of the man who has taken his daughter. He summons his neighbors. They go through the village and to distant villages, making a fine noise, searching everywhere—except where they know the lovers are hiding.

And all this time the boy and the girl whisper the secret that only lovers know. Her blows become endearments; her screams, murmurs; she confesses there is naught but love.

After the third day, the relatives of the bridegroom visit the father. Their entrance is the cue for his big scene. He rises and out-Herods Herod, vowing that he has pondered the offense and that only vengeance will appease him. But, say the relatives, your daughter is well; she loves and is loved, and she wishes to return to her father's house, to bring with her the man of her choice. They speak words of solace, but the father is deaf. At last they go away.

Next day they return. At this second visit they intimate that a monetary consolation might assist the father in forgiving the wrong done him. Would money soothe the paternal anger? How much money? Gradually the father ceases to be histrionic, becomes practical, and eventually names a sum he knows the bridegroom can pay: twenty-five dollars, fifty dollars, a hundred dollars. The relatives pay it and hurry

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

away to tell the groom that the father has been placated. Straightway the young couple come from their hiding. They go to the house of the bride. And soon the feasting begins. Fine pigs are served, pigs beautifully roasted, and with them little cakes. The village orchestra plays glad music. The priest pours the holy water and scatters the petals of sweet flowers: he tells the boy and girl that they are married.

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The young Balinese who told me the story of the marriage custom said that occasionally the father's objections were sincere; the father then refused to sell his daughter. But somebody had to sell her, else she was not legally married. To prevent illegality and illegitimacy, the Dutch government in such cases plays the part of the father and sells the girl for a set fee of six dollars and a quarter. These marriages are often failures, the wife brooding because she was sold for only six dollars and a quarter, while women about her fetched as high as a hundred dollars. Naturally she is miserable.

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Divorce laws of Bali decree that a woman who runs away from her husband shall be fined twenty-six dollars; ten dollars to the husband, sixteen dollars to the government. If the husband keeps the wife five years and then proves cruel, she can gain her freedom and demand one third of his property; but if he divorces

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

her before a year has passed, he can send her back to her father and get a rebate.

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In pools and waterfalls of Bali I have seen the native women bathing and massaging their nude bodies. They rub their skin with pumice stones, with oil, and with rice powder. They tint their fingernails and toenails with henna. They are not shy. They understand no reason why they should be. They are merely caring for their bodies.

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A Balinese man condemned to death in olden days was first dressed all in white and his head adorned with flowers. With his friends he went to the temple of the dead and there he prayed. Afterward he walked to the cremation field.

A counselor of the court read the judgment, declaring that for incendiarism, running amok, accusation of a regent, or abducting a regent's wife, any one must die. He named the offense of the condemned man, folded the palm leaf, upon which the judgment was written, and thrust it into the girdle of the guilty one.

An executioner, named by the regent or chosen by lot from all the men of the village, stepped forward and said: "I am about to kill you, but I kill you not because I hate you, but because it is the judgment that has been spoken. And yet before I kill you I must ask your permission. If you do not give me permission I shall not

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

kill you. Grant me your permission, for what I do is only a just deed."

The condemned man invariably answered: "Do your duty."

The executioner then stepped back, drew a kris from his girdle, leapt forward, and buried the kris in the breast bared to receive it.

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An old Balinese gentleman told me about the execution custom in the island. An American lady who heard him, shuddered as he finished his story. "How horrible!" she said.

And I thought of men I have seen writhing at the end of taut ropes, of men and women whose bodies I have seen rigid as the current raced through them. I thought of newspaper stories I have written that the lady and her friends might know exactly how an American state collected the life debt and exactly how the prisoner died.

"How horrible!" she said.

I never saw an American walk to his death with flowers in his hair. I never heard an American warden ask permission to kill. But I have heard men cry out as the straps were tightened about them. I have heard them swear and bellow, only to be hurled back into the chair and trussed for the slaughter.

"How horrible!" she said.

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## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

In the early days of Bali all books were made from the leaves of the lontar palm, the author cutting the characters in the leaf with a kris. A book was made by sewing the leaves together. . . . It is said that some of the tales of the *Arabian Nights* were written in Bali and that the palm leaf books were carried back to Arabia by Moslem traders. I hope it is true. It would be fine to think that Scheherazade drew some of her exquisite wisdom from this little island.

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In the district of Bali where there was a great drought, rice dying, fields cracking open with the heat, the priests and elders met and promised temple offerings if the gods would send rain. Rain came, and the offerings were given.

But the next year there was a drought, and the next, and the next. Offerings of all kinds were given, but no rain would come. Finally a desperate priest promised the highest offering, a human sacrifice. Straightway springs burst forth on the hillside and the people saw their rice flourish: there would be food and feasting.

With plenty, came sorrow, for the people knew that some one must be laid upon the altar. In council they debated how to avoid the sacrifice; far into the night they talked, but their talk was futile, until at last an old man asked to be heard. He reminded his friends that the offerings were not due until after all crops had been harvested, and all crops, he said, had not been

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

harvested. Why should they be? If from year to year a part of the old rice was left standing, then the harvest would never be made, the sacrifice never due.

The people of the district laugh at the way they tricked the gods. And the gods, they say, join in the laugh; they like to be gods of such clever people.

## XVIII

**W**OMEN and tall straight girls brought their gifts to the temple. Baskets of sweetmeats and melons and mangosteens, baskets of hibiscus and oleanders they brought balanced upon their heads. The fruits and the flowers rose above the baskets and towered upward, arranged in layers of contrasting colors. The road was filled with women and tall straight girls bringing their gifts to the temple, each girl with one soft arm raised, supporting the load upon her head. Beneath the baskets the full bodies of the women and girls, naked from the waist up, gleamed firm in the sunlight. From the waist down sarongs of green and orange and violet, drawn tight, molded curved hips that swung rhythmically. Naked feet showed beneath the sarongs. Blue shadows of the lontar palm fondled the bodies, sliding slowly over the strong young bodies of the girls.

Men with bright flowers in their hair brought suckling pigs, well roasted, pigs with flowers in their nostrils and in their ears. They brought roasted chickens and palm wine and mats to sleep on. They came to be guests of the god, in the temple of the god. The men of the gamelan came. They brought the trompongs and the joblags and the jalungs.

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

In the temple courtyard flags were flying, red flags and black flags and white flags; all were silk and all were flying. Men and women and children squatted; chattering, they ate nuts and durians.

High above the courtyard rose the scaffold on which sat the *pedanda*, the holy priest whose blessing was to sanctify the assemblage, make sacred the ceremonies; he sat upon the scaffold awaiting the golden bell to summon him to his washing, and when the bell sounded he washed his body, and his wife washed his feet, and after the body was cleansed, that the spirit of Siva might enter into it, he washed his teeth with pulverized ashes. Facing the east, he chanted a prayer and rang a golden bell with a golden tone, then sat down, for the spirit of Siva had entered into him.

Upon the fingers of his left hand were spikes of gold three inches long. He made patterns with his hands, an infinite number of patterns, each more beautiful than the last—I had never known that human hands could be altars of rhythm—and after he worshiped with his hands he blessed the offerings of the people as they filed past. All afternoon he blessed the gifts, while the lesser priests cast the holy water and scattered flower petals.

That night the gamelan played. In the moon-drenched night the music surged through me. I listened to the gamelan and I watched the feasting. I feasted with them, eating roasted suckling pig and melons and mangosteens. I saw the lesser priests serve the meat and pour the palm wine. And when

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

all had finished feasting, the gamelans ceased their soft dreaming, ended their murmurs of tone, and whirled into a throb like the beat of an excited heart.

Girls came into the courtyard, dancing with flowers in their hair. They danced for a moment, then went away. Younger girls came, girls ten years old, wearing sarongs of brocade, green and gold; and their headdresses, larger than their heads, were heavy with gold. The gold of the sarongs and the gold of the headdresses flickered dully in the light of the palm torches. Long the girls danced, but I did not tire of their dancing. I heard the gamelan grow harsh. It beat in my wrists and temples. I saw the little dancers weave strange figures upon the ground, marking them by the path of their naked feet. Long they danced, then went away.

The gamelan crashed into a new pulsation, faster, like the quick breathing of passion. An old man with staring eyes raced about the courtyard waving a sword, leaping, shouting. Once he stopped and howled. His white hair was rich with flowers from which petals shattered. His sword hissed as he swirled it through the air. Pounding his sunken chest, he flung himself high and landed upon lean old legs, then ran away howling.

I heard men and women breathing to the quick beat of the gamelan. I breathed with them.

Five girls in sarongs of dull red marched from a corner of the courtyard, marched to the dictates of the gamelan. In the right hand of each girl gleamed a



### THE BALINESE HIGH PRIEST

*"He worshiped with his hands; his hands were altars of rhythm."*



## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

golden kris. Round and round in a circle marched the tall, the full-molded girls, their muscles sliding softly beneath smooth skin, quivering bodies rising and ebbing to the beat of the gamelan, breasts heaving, sinking, heaving, sinking, until suddenly one of the girls stopped. Her feet spread, her eyes closed, her hips swayed and jerked as slowly she rose upon tiptoe, remained for a moment rigid, then melted to the earth and lay there, limp.

The other dancers marched the feverish circle; round and round and round they marched to the driving beat of the gamelan. Their eyes staring, perspiration bright upon them, they marched their rapturous way until at last the leader stopped and flung her arm upward. Her face drawn in ecstasy, her ribs showing as her breath sucked in and out, her tortured gasps sounded above even the bombilation of the gamelan. For an instant she stood all rigid; then she struck with the kris. With a great ripping blow she slashed her breast. Again she struck, and again and again. Then all the girls were striking with the kris. All were slashing at their breasts. Their bodies streaming red, they still slashed.

Old men hopped about the circle. Old men shut their eyes and clasped their fists until knuckles shone white like pearls set in bronze. Old men strove violently to awaken dead embers. Women shrilled their frenzy, rose, trembled, fell, and lay gasping. Young men plunged into the circle and fought with the dancers for the knives, grasping the wet blades and gashing

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

their hands; their teeth set, they fought for the knives, got them, and slashed their bodies until their blood mingled upon the ground with the blood of the dancers.

And then one of the dancers collapsed. And another. And another. Moaning, they lay upon the ground.

And then the pedanda, the holy priest, high upon his scaffold, lifted his hand with the golden spikes and rang the golden bell. Priests entered the circle and carried away the bleeding bodies of the dancers. They carried them away. All of them. These new brides of the god.

## XIX

**I**N the Orient, Mac, one misses humor more than he misses bathtubs. The Japanese, Chinese, and Siamese undoubtedly have their little jokes, but you never know anything about them. Among the Orientals, so far as I know, the Balinese alone see the humor in their daily lives and are gracious enough to let me see it, too. They carve jokes on temple walls and permit me to look at them. They are a lot of Peter Arnos depicting their merry humor in the sandstone of their churches. I go to the temple to pray, and stay to laugh, which is finer. Oh, I love these Balinese. They have taught me subtleties in the art of living.

If you will remember, Mac, the lesser gods were not famous for their enjoyment of humor. It was Jove who rocked Olympus with his laughter, seeing and understanding the cosmic humor in the pettiness, intolerance, arrogance, and hypocrisy about him, beholding both the celestial and terrestrial absurdities and finding them tremendously amusing. Imagine a whole people blessed with that understanding! What couldn't the American nation be if the senators would suddenly break out in laughter, forget their ponderous declamations, leave their desks, and go carve light and farcical love scenes on the walls of the capitol? And

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

think, too, how jolly it would be if the ecclesiastic façades along Fifth Avenue were embellished with nudes so grotesque that they made you laugh! Balinese solons decorate their capital with such carvings; Balinese priests cut their gay humor into the temple walls. . . .

The art of Bali is born to-day, lives its life span of a few years, is destroyed, and other creations take its place. After the exquisite carvings are finished, they are polished and colored until they look like Persian enamel; then the rain and the moss come and the carvings soon turn green and crumble away. The temples themselves are made of a soft sandstone that quickly erodes and is easily shaken down by the periodic earthquakes. But what of that? The fathers built the first temple; the sons will build another. Only a small part of the day is given to labor in the rice fields and to cockfighting; the rest of the day must be spent in practicing the arts, else the soul dies. And so the temple walls and gateposts are covered by intricate and fantastic carvings, whimsical, spontaneous, springing from the life of the people, from the souls of farmers who cut stones because they must express the artistry born within them. The farmers know that soon their work will be marred by the rain, that soon it will be gone; but so will they.

The Balinese know nothing of immortality through art. They carve because it is their wish, their love for the moment. No one signs his work. Perhaps that glorious design of flowers intertwining was carved by the sailor who brought you ashore on his naked

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

back. That terrifying figure of the god may have been carved by the old man who sells little pigs in the market-place. Possibly that face of haunting beauty was carved by the boy who plows with his water buffalo in the rice field. The Balinese don't know. They have forgotten. It doesn't matter. One man carves the stones. Another plays the trompong. Another hammers miracles in silver. Sometimes they all change.

Understand, Mac, that these temple carvings are definitely religious. They are Balinese prayers, expressions of the blessed union of art and religion, the most glorious of all unions. The grotesques of Bali are the gargoyles of Notre Dame, and they are being carved to-day; this minute, Balinese men are cutting their sermons in stones, holy sermons, yet not smug, or boastful.

With the sacred figures are carved Balinese jokes: beside Siva-of-the-many-hands rides an Arab trader on a bicycle, his nose very big and his money bag swollen. Not far from Vishnu, a stone automobile is held up by a stone bandit whose pistol is enormous; the scene is direct from a Hollywood lot, for a Balinese had been to a movie and later laughed about it in stone. A short time ago some one carved a realistic depiction of European soldiers staggering with their bottles. The scene was too realistic and the government issued an order. The Balinese cut away the drunken soldiers and carved a design of holy flowers.

In Bali are many stone expressions of sex. Phallic symbols are common, for the Balinese are Hindus in

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

their religion and honest in their art. Yet they know to take even love lightly, and in their carvings is a grotesque cunning which proves their gayety in sex. A traveler may be disgusted by the obscenities of Pompeii; he can only laugh at the drolleries of Bali.

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The one disappointment in Bali is the coffee. Balinese coffee may be excellent enough, but neither the natives nor the Dutch give it a chance. They roast it until it is black, then grind it into a powder looking like coal dust, and at night filter it with hot water. In the morning they draw it off and serve the black goo cold in one pitcher, hot canned milk in another. One is supposed to pour the two liquids into a cup, stir them together, and call it coffee. And don't ask me why they do it. I asked them why. They said they liked it that way.

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When Balinese girls call on each other, or when they crouch at the side of the road to chat, they take turns searching each others' heads for *kutus*. In former days this search was suggested by a desire for mutual comfort, but at present the girls' heads are comparatively free from the little pests and the search now goes on as a ritual of friendship, indicating that the participants are fairly intimate.

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## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

The Hindu religion, the religion of the Balinese, decrees that the body of man shall be burned. It is an easy and sanitary way of disposing of the dead; but there is an infinitely more important reason, for only by burning can the soul be released and get back to Indraloka, Hindu heaven.

No ordinary burning, no common cremation, would suffice the Balinese; the ceremonies must be elaborate and costly, indeed so costly that a single family cannot afford them, and for that reason the Balinese temporarily preserve or bury their dead, waiting until a number of bodies are ready for the fire; then they assemble them, pool the money offered by the families of the dead, and give the souls a glorious farewell.

In preserving a body, the Balinese first spread it thick with lime, then wrap it tightly and put it in a coffin with three holes cut in the bottom. Beneath these holes, pans are placed, and periodically emptied. When there is no further drip from the first treatment, the body is unwrapped and fresh lime put on, then wrapped again and put back in the coffin. This continues for months, until only the bones remain. Two days ago I was a guest at a house where a body was being preserved; the host, son of the dead man, and his friends ate rice cakes and drank palm wine, laughed and told little stories as they stood beside the coffin with its occasional drip.

The more common method of temporarily disposing of a body is to bury it. In preparing the body for burial it is first washed in fresh water brought from

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

a sacred fountain; then a gold ring is placed on the tongue, a piece of iron thrust between the teeth, a tuberosc put in each nostril, wax in the ears, and the eyes are covered with little mirrors. Afterward the body is anointed, dried with the flowers of the silka plant, wrapped in white linen, and buried.

But the soul must not be buried, for it doesn't like to live under ground. A hollow bamboo pipe is therefore driven down until it rests upon the body, acting as a chimney into the grave and giving a passageway for the soul to come up and get a little fresh air occasionally. No one worries about the soul running away. It can't leave the earth until the body is burned.

Shortly before a cremation, the undertaker notifies the families that are preserving bodies, then goes to the graveyard and digs up those that have been buried. The bodies that he digs up he washes, at least what is left of them, wraps in tissue paper and delivers to the homes of relatives where they are laid out in state.

And now is the time for fine feasting. There must be days and nights of gayety. Everywhere the gamelans play. Everywhere there is dancing, ringing of priestly bells, smell of sweet incense. Every one eats well-roasted pigs and drinks palm wine. Every one wishes the souls a merry journey, a happy visit to Indraloka, and a pleasant reincarnation.

Early on the morning of the third day chosen men go to the streams where the bodies have been assembled. They lift the coffins. The signal is given.

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

The death parade begins. At the head of the procession march the gamelans, six or eight or ten gamelans, booming out the gay music of the dead. Behind the gamelans, bearers hold aloft coffins carved to represent all the animals of the land and all the fishes of the sea, for by the shape of the coffin one may tell the rank of the body inside: a rajah is carried in a serpent coffin, a man of lesser rank in a bull coffin, his wife in a wooden cow. Behind the coffins march the women and children wearing sarongs of red and gold and green, their hair bright with flowers.

At the cremation ground the bearers divide, half against half, good against evil, then open the coffins, take out the remains and throw them about, tossing them through the air as the forces of good and evil contend for the possession of the body. In the symbolic struggle the wrappings may become loosened and an arm suddenly stick forth, a leg slip from its binding, a head fall out. Whatever drops to the ground is picked up. An arm or a leg is particularly easy to brandish in the race across the cremation ground.

After the struggle has ended, and the forces of good have won, the body is carried to the funeral pyre. Friends and relatives cry out for the fire to take the body and release the soul. Then a torch is lighted and the flames surge up. In the black smoke that billows heavenward the souls of the dead race away to Indraloka and the Balinese are very happy.

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

To-morrow, Mac, I'm going away from Bali. I'm going back to Singapore, to clothes and motor trucks and adding machines. Here in Bali I walked erect, laughed with the stars and trees, caught a glimpse of an earthly Indraloka; I kept a tryst with beauty. And to-morrow I'm going away. I shall be stripped of my coat of gold. I shall lose the flowers from my hair. Once more I shall wear a Manhattan shirt and a Stetson hat. And I am sad, even though I know that in the long years ahead my memories of Bali will partially lullaby my discontents.

## XX

**I**N the month of *Thai*, which Christians call January, the Hindus of the world celebrate the festival of *Thaipusam*, at which time they pay vows to the God Subramaniam.

I was in Singapore in the month of Thai. I saw the Hindus pay their vows. . . .

At the foundation of all, says the Hindu, is *Tapas*, which is penance or self-mortification. Through *Tapas* the soul can be freed from the senses, from the affectations and desires of earthly life; to gain this soul freedom the Hindu will endure tortures and agonies. He will stare into the sun until his eyes are burned out. He will hold his arms above him until they wither and he must be fed like a baby. He will bury himself, only his head above ground, and remain buried for weeks. He will sleep upon a bed of thorns or nails; or hang head downward, a smoldering fire beneath him; or swing in mid-air, held by flesh-hooks buried in his back; or pierce his tongue with steel needles, his body with innumerable darts; or sit beneath the blistering Indian sun, five fires at his back; or sit beside a clear stream, bowls of cool water upon his head, and die of thirst.

In India to-day are five million Sadhus, professional

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

holy men, producing nothing and living entirely on the bounty of their lay fellows. Many Sadhus voluntarily mutilate themselves. Many of them assume one posture which they never change, declaring it best suited for calm reasoning with the soul, for teaching the soul that the ways of the body cannot lead to happiness, since the body is only temporal. Many of them become *viragha mouni*, men who spend their lives in speechless silence and in watching their finger-nails grow to extreme lengths, sometimes growing to such length, and curving as they grow, that they pierce the palm, causing infection and death. . . .

The practice of self-torture is so widespread and so common among Hindus that at the festival of Thaipusam the devotees who mortify the flesh are usually not professional holy men; they are ordinary Hindus who have asked a favor of the God Subramaniam and have promised him something in return. Subramaniam has granted the favor. The Hindu must pay. It is simply a *quid pro quo*.

During a serious illness a Hindu may seek health by making a contract with his god. If there is divine intercession, if the body is cured, then at Thaipusam the contract must be fulfilled; the man must pay his vow or be stricken with the original disease, its ravages greatly increased.

Three days before the beginning of Thaipusam, those who are to participate, whether because of a desire to gain celestial credit or because of a necessity to pay a vow, go apart and begin their fast. For three

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

days and three nights they eat nothing and only occasionally sip water. Their wives are forbidden them; the touch of a woman during the fasting period would bring horrible disease. The devotee sleeps and meditates. Often he remains for hours intent upon only the serene and detached consideration of his umbilicus.

On the morning of the ordeal the zealot bathes his body, knots a fresh cloth about his loins, and, accompanied by his friends, goes to the temple. There he sits upon a small stool contemplating his *kavadi*, a heavy wooden frame covered with sweet smelling flowers which he must carry on his shoulder while making his pilgrimage from one temple to another. As the man sits in contemplation, a brass bowl filled with burning cow dung at his feet, his friends gather about him, one of them chanting from the *Theveram*, the sacred book of the Hindus. The pungent smoke rises and the chant goes on until the zealot stirs, his muscles become taut, then relaxed, then taut again. Slowly his eyes take on the blank stare of one in a trance. Suddenly they become set. The man raises his arms. He is ready. . . .

I saw one man with twenty-four lemons fastened to hooks buried in the flesh of his breast. A silver spear, as large as a knitting needle, was thrust through one cheek, through the tongue, and four inches beyond the other cheek.

I saw one man with a hundred spears stuck into his abdomen and a hundred spears stuck into the small

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

of his back. Upon the upper end of these spears rested an iron frame weighing twenty-five pounds.

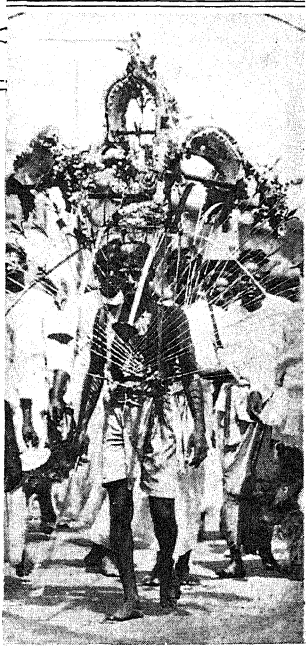
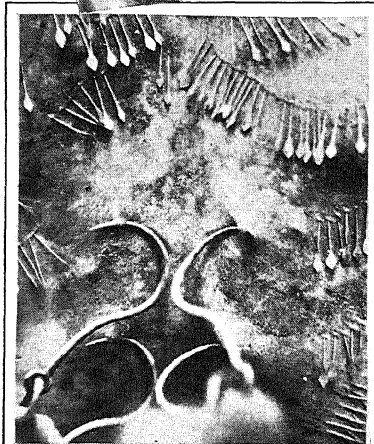
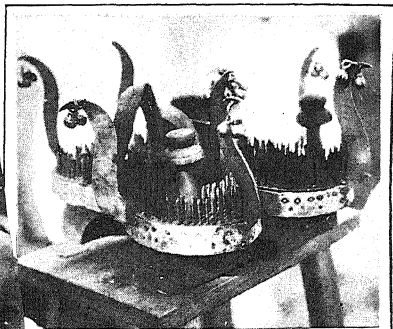
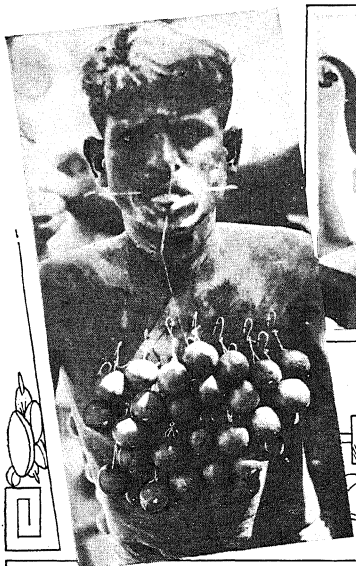
I saw one man carrying an earthen pot of fire. The flames rose directly before his face.

I saw one man, virtually naked, roll over and over: he rolled for a distance of five miles.

I saw one man with three hundred darts in his chest, one hundred darts in each arm, one hundred in each leg, and five hundred in his back. Across the flesh of his forehead, silver needles were sewed in and out. His tongue, pierced by four spears, protruded two inches beyond his lips. This man weighed two hundred and thirty pounds and he walked on wooden sandals with a hundred nails, their points filed to a needle sharpness, driven into them. In the small of his back six hooks like ice tongs were clamped, then a rope was fastened to the hooks and to a car weighing two hundred pounds; the man dragged the car by the hooks driven into his flesh. At noon, without any protection from the tropic sun, he made a four-mile pilgrimage, walking upon nail sandals, dragging the cart, and carrying a heavy kavadi.

The darts, needles, and spears were at no time treated with an antiseptic. They were thrust into the flesh by the ungloved hands of priests. I handled some of the needles immediately before they were inserted and was allowed to drive two of them through the cheeks and the tongue of a devotee.

At the end of the pilgrimage the priests jerked out



### THAIPUSAM

*Upper left: With spears through his cheeks and tongue, and lemons hooked in his breast, he pays his vow to the god.*

*Upper right: On these nail-sandals one devotee walked four miles.*

*Lower left: Five hundred darts in his back, and six iron hooks in his flesh!*

*Lower right: A seventy-five pound frame resting upon the ends of spears—the other ends resting in his back and abdomen!*



## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

the needles and darts, applied wood ashes and cow dung, and gave each zealot a few drops of water. After an hour's rest, the pilgrims broke their fast. At this time no scars or marks could be found upon any of them. I carefully inspected the cheeks and back of the man who dragged the cart, but could see no sign of punctures made by spears or tongs.

As the needles and darts were thrust into the flesh, there was no bleeding. During the pilgrimage and, later, as the darts were jerked from the flesh, there was no bleeding. Throughout the ceremony I did not see one drop of blood.

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During Thaipusam, thousands of worshipers, eager to attend the ceremonies, come from afar. The crowds around the shrines are so dense that to advance a hundred yards requires half an hour. Packed in the temples, the pilgrims sprinkle holy water and chant prayers. Upon the terrible heat floats the heavy smell of flowers and of sweat-pores only half clogged with sweetish talcum powder.

In the sand courtyard outside the temple, brightly dressed dancers ceaselessly whirl, flinging themselves into strained contortions.

Cobras, lifting their heads from baskets in the sand, sway to the shrill music played by their masters.

The Hindu, ordinarily the whimpering recipient of kicks and blows, goes wild. As I was photographing a man with spears in his cheeks and knives in his

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

breast, he whirled and crashed his kavadi upon me, splitting my sun helmet and opening a gash in my head. Less than a minute before the blow was delivered he had given me permission to photograph him.

The British government unofficially opposes the festival of Thaipusam, but because of the essential policy of religious toleration can not issue an edict against it, though Britain now forbids Hindus to swing from poles by the muscles of the back, or to seek holy death by casting their bodies beneath Subramaniam's silver chariot as the god rides from one temple to another.

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The day after Thaipusam I called upon the leading European doctors of Singapore. They could not explain what I had seen. One of them said that he had lived in Singapore nineteen years and that the Thaipusam contradiction of Western medical knowledge, at least the apparent contradiction, became more mysterious to him each time he saw it.

I called on the man who had walked on nails and dragged the cart. He had merely paid his vow to Subramaniam. Subramaniam had cured him of fever.

I visited the Hindu priests. They smiled kindly and told me not to be puzzled: Subramaniam always cares for his children.

For a week I asked questions and got no answers. I learned nothing. Apparently neither the science of the West nor the mysticism of the East can explain the seeming miracles I had seen.

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

Perhaps it is all a form of catalepsy.

Perhaps it is a bodily control about which we of the Occident know nothing.

Perhaps Subramaniam *does* care for his children.

## XXI

**M**Y DEAR DAD: At present I'm stuck on an old sea cradle rocking along the coast of Malaya. Ten days from Singapore to Rangoon! I'd get wretchedly lonely if it weren't for Mr. Finch of Kansas.

We met as the ship cast off from Singapore. He offered me a cigar and told me he'd made a million out of wheat. "Then," he said, "I decided to see the world. And I tell you, son, it's all the same: the palm trees of Cambodia, of Siam, and of Java are just like the palm trees of Florida and New Orleans." He drew deeply on his cigar, then whiffed the smoke into the night. "I've been in the Orient four months and I haven't found any Oriental palm trees growing ostrich feathers."

Mr. Finch is right. The palm trees of the Orient *are* like the palm trees of America; the cities of the Orient *are* like the cities of America: they have all become Americanized. Beyond the city limits one would be in the forest primeval, among men not graduated from cannibalism, but a tourist doesn't go into the forest; he sees no more of cannibals and head-hunters than a guest at the Blackstone sees of gangsters down in Little Sicily. The head-hunter is in the jun-

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

gle; the tourist is in the city—in the city the heathen Chinese and the wild man from Borneo both sleep in iron bedsteads, eat Campbell's soup, and wear derby hats.



On a corner in Tokyo stands a department store, one show-window filled with natty business suits. The next window displays shoes and neckties; a silver-topped walking stick lies jauntily across a pair of silk socks. In the next, three wax mannikins wear gowns from Paris and New York. The fourth window is filled with children's wear: little sailor suits, rompers, corduroy trousers for small boys, printed voile dresses for small girls. The corner window is triangular, the floor covered with sand; beneath a striped umbrella a lady and gentleman, both wearing beach costumes from Miami and Biarritz, make frog houses with a little boy and girl. . . . Inside the entrance, a floorwalker bows, his hands unctuous: "Evening shirts? Very good, sir. Second floor, third aisle. Please take the elevator at your right."

Across the street is a six-story office building made of American steel and white marble. One enters through swinging glass doors. At the right is a wall directory printed in both Japanese and English. A signal light announces the arrival of an elevator; the door is opened by a uniformed attendant. In the offices are flat American desks with glass on top. Beside

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

each desk is a metal waste basket. There is a steady click of typewriters.

After leaving the office building, one goes next door to a drug store. Upon the glass counters are American soaps and pastes and powders. Signs announce a special Saturday sale: thirty-five cent soap, thirty-two cents; twenty cent paste, seventeen cents. "Buy to-day and save your money." Behind the marble-top soda fountain stands a young Japanese in white apron and white coat, a brimless hat cocked at exactly the correct international angle for soda jerkers. And he, too, flings the shaved ice into the air, skids the glass along the counter, and says, "Please pay the cashier."

Tokyo is indicative of other large Oriental cities; they all have department stores, office buildings, soda jerkers. Soon the flowered kimono of the geisha will be completely smothered by creations from Marshall Field, the silken robe of the mandarin vanish beneath Kuppenheimer's best.

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In making a budget for Eastern travel you can take this rule as certain and safe: draw up a generous estimate, double it, add some extras, tack on a few hundred dollars for incidentals, and you still won't have enough.

I have talked with men of great wealth who spend lavishly, with persons of ordinary means, and with college professors. The average cost of travel in the Orient seems to be twenty-five dollars a day, an

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

amount that allows first-class travel on steamers and trains, living at best hotels, seeing recommended sights, and buying a reasonable number of curios.

The other day in Singapore I hired a guide for six dollars and an automobile for eight dollars. That night I rented a sampan for four dollars. My room and meals at the hotel were ten dollars. The expenditure for the day was twenty-eight dollars.

The next day I bought two packs for my movie camera for fifteen dollars and some Malacca walking sticks for eight dollars. My laundry came back, the bill two dollars. In the evening I paid three dollars to see a Russian troupe dance at the municipal theater. Taxis for the day were two dollars. Cocktails, cigarettes, and other incidentals: three dollars. Hotel bill: ten dollars. Total for the second day: forty-three dollars.

And this goes on day after day.

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There was a time, back in Birmingham, when things happened as I wanted or "I did something about it," but now, here in the Orient, I let Time's withered old finger scrawl away at its own pace and I do nothing about it. When I first arrived in the Orient I spent most of my time kicking against the pricks, demanding that milk be brought in sealed containers and that trains leave when scheduled; but after a time my heels became all bloody and my head very bowed: I learned the beauty of passiveness.

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"There's no boat sailing this week," says the ship's agent.

"That's all right. What about next week?"

"All passages booked for next week."

"That's all right. Next month—perhaps?"

"Perhaps—just a minute. I can fix you up for week after next. We've got a freighter going out at that time. She'll be carrying a cargo of onions, hides, and live pigs. You'll have to sleep next to the boilers and eat below deck. What about it?"

"Swell."

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In the Orient one soon learns that the native, be he shopkeeper, taxi-driver, or house servant, has his own ideas and nothing can change them.

At the best hotel in Tokyo my room-boy closed the shutters every evening. I told him I wanted them left open. "Sank you very much," he said. The next night the shutters were closed. I said I wanted them left open. "Sank you very much." For five nights the game went on. He won.

In Peiping I spent a week explaining that I loathed lemon in my tea. At the end of a week I decided that lemon in tea didn't taste half bad.

Eight mornings in Siam I tried to teach the cook to boil an egg to my liking. On the ninth morning I ordered scrambled eggs.

At a hotel in Java I ordered a second bed sheet, and, after various adventures, got it. The next morn-

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

ing the room-boy took it away. That evening I made him bring it back. The next morning, while I was at breakfast, he slipped into my room and stole it again.

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If that celebrated philanthropist wished to be a still greater friend of man, he'd leave the side of the road and open a travel bureau in the Orient.

In America and Europe, travel bureaus are of some value; but in the East, apparently, their collective value is to give incorrect information, misdirect your extra luggage, and casually lose your letters. Their greatest service is to lure tourists into spending money, particularly to see sights of no possible interest.

"Have you seen 'The Hill of a Thousand Diamonds'?" asks the clerk at the travel bureau.

"No," you admit, "I haven't seen that."

"What! Not seen 'The Hill of a Thousand Diamonds'! What, what!" he gasps. After he recovers he calls out: "Here, boy, bring me a ticket and get me a guide. Be quick."

But you shake your head and go away, leaving the clerk very *désolé*. Later you wonder. You may never be in the Orient again. Perhaps you should see "The Hill of a Thousand Diamonds," though you have no idea what it is. So back you go, pay quantities of money, and start on the expedition. For hours you race along in an expensive automobile. Then you mount a horse. Afterward you get off and walk.

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Finally the guide stops, and, with a great flourish, waves his hand.

“‘The Hill of a Thousand Diamonds!’” he whispers, somewhat as Moses murmured: “The burning bush!” You look about you. You are on top of a little hummock. Below you lie a dozen mud puddles from which the sun in a half-hearted manner glints wearily.

At the next stopping place, it's the same story. Have you seen “The Golden Finger of God”? No, you haven't seen it, but you'll go. It proves to be a mangy old rock sitting on some other rocks. And the sight of the divine digit costs you twenty-five dollars.

So it is with “The Sea of a Thousand Skulls,” a field with a hundred round stones scattered about it; and “The Valley of the Veils of the Angels,” a ravine where at sunrise one sees a tepid mist oozing along the ground; and “The Camel of Mohammed,” a hill which a man bleary-eyed drunk couldn't possibly imagine was shaped like a camel.

It's all very annoying, but there's really nothing one can do about it. We are what we are, and Barnum found it out long ago.

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You may say, Dad, that this letter is a peculiar one for a traveler to write home. Perhaps it is. Perhaps I should tell you of only Oriental customs; but to-night I don't feel so Oriental. As I sail through the quiet

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waters off the coast of Malaya, I'm just a little homesick; to-night I almost agree with Dr. Johnson: "The famous sights of the world are all worth seeing, but none of them is worth going to see."

## XXII

MR. RUDYARD KIPLING, my dear Annette, is not at his best in his poems of raging trumpets, booming drums, and the Union Jack fluttering high above the Empire. One can applaud a few of his unquestionably fine pieces; but when Britannia is his inspiration, Mr. Kipling is a trifle boisterous. And of all the Fuzzy-Wuzzies, Danny Deevers, and Gunga Dins, there's none I so earnestly dislike as "Mandalay." We used to sing it in the Oberlin Glee Club: hundreds of times I've heard the dawn thunder out of China 'crost the bay. I didn't like it then. I don't like it now. And I've suffered poetic misery with it during the last ten days.

Ten days ago I set out to sail from Singapore to Rangoon. On the way north we put in at Penang, then sailed from there late one afternoon, steering for Burma. From that minute a new fire came into the eyes of the passengers. Their steps quickened. Their gestures became more abrupt. Daily, nay, hourly they greeted each other with a poetic quotation. Such a versified voyage would have been altogether charming, except that the quotation always came from the same poem and was always recited in exactly the same manner.

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

Two women would be walking the deck and would meet two other women. All four would look at each other and grin the same grin. Then, in unison, with increasing speed, and with an ever-rising inflection, they would repeat, "On the road to Mandalay." After which, they would pass each other. A few minutes later in their circle of the deck they would meet again, and again they would grin and say, "On the road to Mandalay." Soon that dreaded line became an eagle tearing at my liver.

An old man on board, who has lived in the East for years, told me that Kipling's poem has brought more tourists to Burma than all the advertisements executed by tourist agencies and steamship companies. He said that men and women of both England and America eagerly cross ocean and desert to see the little girl whose petticoat was yaller and whose little cap was green.

"But you'll find that you made a mistake to come so far out of your way to see Burma," he said. "Rangoon, the chief city of the country, is frightfully dull; the interior, too, is comparatively uninteresting."

. . .

The chief show place of Rangoon is a great pagoda containing relics of Shin Gautama and of three Buddhas who preceded him; there are eight hairs from the head of Gautama, a drinking cup of another Buddha, a robe of a third, and a staff of a fourth. With such treasures, the Shwe Dagon naturally is con-

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

sidered one of the most holy pagodas of the Burmese world. I'm afraid, though, that its holiness was a total loss for me: the guards forced me to take off my shoes and socks, leaving me barefooted, hopping about upon marble blistering hot.

The Shwe Dagon is an enormous bell-shaped pagoda covered with gold leaf. It is three hundred and seventy feet high, higher than the dome of St. Paul's in London, and the circumference of the base is one thousand, three hundred and fifty-five feet; each foot of the base is taken up by four beggars and six other persons trying to sell you flowers, curios, and the usual gimcracks offered at every tourist center.

Near the bottom of the pagoda is a circular platform upon which shrines have been built; the most popular contains a golden image of the Buddha, though my favorite was a tiny one guarded by three little girls and two little boys who crouched on the floor behind the images and played "put and take." Periodically it was necessary for one of them to leave the game, go bang on the sacred gong, and shout for the faithful to worship. Each little gambler took his turn inciting the pilgrims to pray. And each little gambler combined a wise faith in his god with a wise distrust of his fellowman, for as he beat on the gong and bellowed the need for prayer, he carefully peered around the images to see that none of his playmates moved the counters in the game.

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The pagoda is reputed the most interesting sight in Rangoon, but I disagree; far more interesting to me is a little Burmese girl sauntering along the street, smoking a cheroot as thick as her wrist. The cheroot preferred by the Rangoon debutante is eight inches long and two inches in diameter. It is good for all day, and, I'm told, at night is hung on the bedpost as a mosquito smudge.

At puberty every Burmese girl has her ear-lobes bored; afterward increasingly large ear plugs are thrust into the openings until eventually the lobes are loops of flesh hanging downward. Whenever a girl wants to rest her cheroot, to save it for another time, she extinguishes it, then thrusts it through the loop in the lobe of her ear.

A few days ago I rather annoyed an old Burmese by telling him that his people permitted their babies to begin smoking even before they were weaned. He assured me that babies were not allowed to smoke regularly until after they could stand alone, though he admitted that mothers sometimes gave a nursing child a whiff from the maternal cheroot.

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After a stillbirth in Burma, the body of the child is wrapped in a cloth and put in a coffin; a relative of the mother then puts a piece of iron beside the body, leans over the coffin, and whispers: "Thou art not to return into thy mother's womb until this piece of iron has become as soft as a young bird's down."

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

One of the most attractive arts of the Burmese is their painting of delicate designs upon parchment sunshades. My first morning in Rangoon I saw a little Burmese girl tripping along beneath such a parasol. The top had been painted a quiet mauve; upon the mauve, in soft greens and pinks, ladies walked in pleasant gardens, an old man read a book, and a child played with a puppy. Later in the day I saw a painted parasol upon which men rode forth to battle, swords were drawn, and mighty buffets struck. I have found a sunshade much to my liking which I bought for you, *chérie*: a young man dreams through space toward a curved moon of crystal and sings beneath an open window and bows before the woman he loves.

. . .

In the bazaar I bought some honey, beautifully clear and golden, and took it back to the hotel where I gave it to one of the servants, telling him to serve it with my tea. Later when I returned to the lobby I saw an English lady whose husband is back in the interior for a month; I asked her to take tea with me. When the boy brought the honey I held it up to the light and boasted of its color.

"I bought it myself," I said.

The lady looked up quickly. "Where?" she asked.

"In the bazaar."

"Then take it away, take it away." She spoke rapidly in Burmese to the boy. He took it and hurried off. "And eat it yourself," she called after him.

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“But, why? The honey was—”

“The honey sold in the bazaars, my dear old stupid, has been used to embalm the body of a dead priest. When the time comes for the body to be cremated, the honey is drained off and sold.”

## XXIII

A MAN traveling slowly around the world meets many other men—white men, I mean. Most of them quickly expose themselves. This man's soul is mean, and sly, and selfish. This man's soul is rotten with arrogant vanity inspired by tangible wealth. This man's soul is honest, and clean, and fine: sturdily he gets on with the work of the world, feeds the world, clothes it, keeps it warm.

When men get away from home, from cities and faces they know, they like to talk about themselves. Each man wants to parade himself, to make you, a stranger, understand that he is a man of importance: in his town he is president of a big corporation, chairman of the annual charity campaign, superintendent of the Sunday school. Most men tell you all this.

Occasionally, though, one meets a man who says nothing. Silent not because he is stupid, but silent because there is nothing to say; lonely, forlorn, heart-broken, he goes his way, wherever that unreasoning way may lead him. Sensitive he is, suffering, helpless, knowing that he is helpless, and yet never whimpering, never raising his hands to ask mercy. Occasionally one meets such a man, touches his shoulder, perhaps,

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

and goes on, saying nothing. I met such a man in Burma. He was a river pilot.

I first saw him at three o'clock one morning. I was on board a ship sailing from the Bay of Bengal to Rangoon. A voice outside the porthole of my cabin woke me. I lay and listened. It was a quiet voice, a little tired, perhaps. I got out of bed and poked my head through the porthole.

The searchlight on the bridge shot down a great beam; in the profound blackness that gulfed us it looked like a cylinder of light, like something you could carry on your shoulder. It stamped out a circle upon the muddy water of the river. In the circle six Burmese sailors rowed a small boat. They sat in couples, lashing out with clumsy oars. I could see their ribs swell beneath their brown skins, then collapse as they breathed. I could see the sweat slide toward the gully of their breastbones, and disappear there.

Hunched in the bow was a white man wearing a cork helmet and a jacket of white duck. His back was to the light and his face was shadowed. A yellow raincoat covered his knees. He called his orders in Burmese and in English.

I saw the sailors in the cylinder of light pass beneath my porthole. I could hear them breathing. Then a rope ladder was thrown down from the deck. It thudded against the side of the ship. The sailors rowed for it, snorting as their oars sank beneath the yellow foam of the river and came up dripping. The

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

boat drew even with the ladder. The white man reached with his left hand, swung himself up, and disappeared into the darkness.

I went back to sleep.

The next morning the pilot was on the bridge. He was wearing the cork helmet. The yellow raincoat was folded on the rail before him. His eyes were set on the river ahead.

To the starboard showed the pier at which we were to dock. We swung out of the current toward it. The pilot's orders were few, given in quiet monosyllables. He never looked to see if his orders were carried out; he merely spoke. The great ship, under her own power, glided up to the pier, hesitated, then touched the bumpers as lightly as a man putting his hands together. The mooring lines were cast ashore; a moment later they were fast.

"All fast," called the mate.

The pilot turned to the captain and bowed slightly; he may have spoken, though I couldn't be sure of that. Immediately afterward, he left the bridge, crossed the deck, and descended by the forward gangway. . . .

That afternoon, when I went into the hotel lobby for tea, I saw the ship's pilot seated alone in a corner. He wore white ducks, clean and fresh. . . . "In the East," an old Dutchman in Java had told me, "when a man's ducks are soiled, or when he goes unshaved, he has given up. He has completely stopped fighting back." "Fighting back against what?" I asked. The old Dutchman, half owner of a little hotel in

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Semarang, peered at me; he seemed to seek in my face the true meaning of my question. "Against what?" he repeated, more to himself than aloud. "Against what is he fighting?" he said again, then looked at me sharply. . . .

I went across to the pilot's table. "I was on the ship you brought in this morning," I said.

"Oh?"

He didn't ask me to sit down, but I did. I don't know why—ordinarily I could not have been so intrusive—but I pulled back a chair and sat down. Furthermore, I made no apologies for doing it. At the time it seemed natural that I should speak to an absolute stranger, then sit at his table.

"You docked the ship marvelously. I've never seen it done so well."

He nodded, that was all. I noticed that there was no gray in his hair, and I was surprised. I judged him to be thirty-eight, though for some reason he seemed older. And regardless of his years he *was* older. Birthdays mean nothing to men who have felt the skewer go through their souls, who for a time struggled to free themselves, then understood, and, as best they could, set about the impossible task of adjusting themselves to the impalement.

A waiter came. I ordered tea.

"Whisky," said the pilot; "bring the bottle."

"Whisky!" I exclaimed, as the waiter went away. "I thought no man in the East dare drink whisky during the day. I heard it was dangerous."

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"I've heard that," said the pilot.

His hair was black and parted on the side. His eyes were blue and seemed unusually large: he had a trick of staring without seeing. Despite his apparent age, there was something almost boyish about his lined and tired face, something, somewhere, that hadn't been stifled, that insisted on coming to the surface and showing itself.

"Do you live in Rangoon?" I asked, after the waiter had served us.

"Yes."

"It must get terribly lonely here."

"Yes," he said, without looking up from the foot swinging loosely at the end of one long leg thrown over the other, "yes, it's almost as lonely as London."

He didn't smile. There was nothing flippant about what he said. As a matter of fact he wasn't answering my remark, he wasn't talking to me at all: he was talking to that foot hanging there—talking to it, but not sure whether it was part of him.

"So you're English," I said.

"Yes."

"I couldn't tell. I heard you last night when you came aboard. I couldn't tell what you were, your accent—it's all mixed up."

"Is it?"

"Very. At times you spoke almost like an American. Have you ever been in the States?"

"Yes."

"Were you visiting, or were you working there?"

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"I was there for a while," he said.

"You came over on a war commission, or something?" I suggested.

"I wasn't in the war." He lifted the glass and finished the drink. "I was too young."

"Too"—I stopped my words, but I saw that he noticed my look of amazement. "Sorry," I dwindled off, lamely.

"It's quite all right. I understand." He took down his sun helmet from the hat tree. "Though as a matter of fact I'm not old, I'm still young." He bowed slightly, as I had seen him bow to the captain that morning. "Thanks a lot for having tea with me," he said; then with long even strides he left the lobby, crossed the pavement in front, and walked out into the road that was changing the yellow heat of the sun into the white heat of the ground.

I don't know, perhaps two minutes, perhaps five minutes passed before I got up. I started upstairs, but stopped when I saw the assistant manager standing by the desk. I went to him.

"See here," I said, "who was that man I was having tea with?"

"His name's Wellston," the manager said.

"Yes, but who is he?"

"So you wonder, too?" The manager's right shoulder rose, then dropped. "His name's Wellston. That's all I know. That's all any of us know."

"He's a river pilot," I said. "He brought the ship—"

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"Oh, I don't mean that. We all know he's a pilot." The manager, a little man, his face red and pinched like a young baby's, opened his hands. "But that's all we know." He glanced behind him. No one was near. "Except"—he dropped his voice—"except that they say he's wealthy. Some even say he's a Baron. They say he is, though I don't know—he may be." The manager looked up suddenly, as if rather startled that he had talked so much, then hurried away to his office and pulled the door shut behind him. . . .

For ten days I saw Wellston. Frequently I saw him in the hotel, a bottle of whisky on the table beside him. There he sat, and yet one could see that he was not in the hotel, not in Burma; God only knows where he was. I saw him one morning in the bank. Another day I saw him outside a shipping office leaning against a post, waiting. Once I saw him at the waterfront. He had just docked a ship.

"Hello," I said.

"Hello," he answered, and started to stop, but didn't. He hurried away from me and turned a corner.

One day we lunched together. I came downstairs and saw Wellston reading a newspaper. I didn't disturb him. A moment later he came into the dining-room.

"Thought I'd join you. Do you mind?"

He didn't eat much; and when the waiter brought the curries, he shuddered. "Can't eat that," he mumbled. "Burn you up. Burn you up—what's left of

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

you." He sat at the table a moment longer, then got up. "Thanks," he said, and went away, hurrying as if devils were after him. And devils *were* after him, so far as I could tell.

I had talked with him a few minutes one afternoon at tea. I had asked him some questions about himself, and I had been thoughtless, unkind, for I had used the word "Why." Why did he stay in Burma? Why didn't he go back to England? Why did he work as a river pilot? In the midst of my questioning I had suddenly looked at him. He was gazing at me, and his eyes pleaded for mercy. They said: You wouldn't ask a man about a hump on his back, a hump endlessly throbbing with pain; you wouldn't do that, would you? Yet you calmly ask me about the hump on my scul.

And suppose I *could* tell you about it, tell exactly when it began its endless growing; suppose there had been something definite that started it; suppose I had killed a man, or stolen, or dishonored myself; suppose there had been something definite I could tell you—would that make you understand? Could you then understand the pain that racks me, tears at me—I who am lonely, wretched, denied the peace that other men boast of, I who wander over the earth bitterly searching for that which I know I can never find. And suppose I told you everything—if there were anything to tell—suppose I told you, you'd not understand, unless you understood before I told you.

I saw him late on the afternoon he lunched with me. I was walking through the town, visiting strange little

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shops, when I saw Wellston turn a corner and come toward me. He was staring at the ground, his hands in his pockets, his shoulders stooped, his tall figure even more loose than usual. I knew he didn't see me and I waited until he was almost on me before I spoke. He looked up in a hazy sort of way. I saw him gather himself from all parts of the world, shake himself free from something.

"I'm out shopping. Won't you come along?" My question was prompted entirely by politeness, for I knew he wouldn't come.

"Good of you," he said.

"You mean you will!"

"Glad to come."

For an hour we visited shops. At the end of that time, Wellston said that he had to go away. He would need to hurry. He had to pilot a ship down the river. . . .

For four days I didn't see him. Then he came into the hotel one night when I was smoking in the lobby after dinner. He came straight to me.

"Hear you're going away to-morrow," he said.

"Yes"—and I wondered who had told him—"I'm going to-morrow, to Calcutta."

Wellston picked up a magazine lying on the table, but didn't open it. He put it down again. "Thought you might enjoy a walk," he said.

"I'd love one."

We went out of the hotel and walked toward the heart of town. I asked about his last trip.

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"Three minutes late," he said. "I misjudged the current."

We turned a corner and there, at the far end of the street, hanging just above a palm tree, was a worn-out moon, heavy, like a nibbled slice from a golden melon. Both of us stopped.

"The moon," I said, after a moment, "the moon more indolently dreams to-night than a fair woman on her couch at rest—"

"God!" Wellston broke in. "Baudelaire! Baudelaire in this damned place!" For an instant he was silent, motionless, his arms stiff beside him, his face toward the sky; then he picked up the quotation: "Caressing, with hand distraught and light, before she sleeps, the contour of her breast. Upon her silken avalanche of—" He broke off abruptly. "Sorry," he said, and set off down the road, his long swinging strides moving him quickly away from me.

I hurried after him, and until midnight we walked. We didn't talk much, though somehow I didn't think of it at the time. As we were going back to the hotel, we passed an entrance with a dim light above it. A native spoke in English, asking if we should like to come in.

"Pretty girls," he said.

We walked on.

"But, sahib, pretty girls. Young girls."

Wellston stopped. In an instant he grew inches taller. He spat out some words in Burmese. The fellow drew back: "Sahib," he said. Wellston and I went on to the hotel. We went upstairs to the ve-

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randa. For a time we sat there, drinking, talking occasionally. Finally, we didn't talk; we stared out at the bay, and at the billions of stars hanging so low that we could have touched them had we but gone to the top of the hotel. It was three o'clock when Wellston got up.

"I'll see you off to-morrow," he said. "I'll be down at the pier to see you off. You sail at four?"

"At four."

He started away and had gone half across the veranda when he turned and came slowly back. He leaned over the table, his hands resting on it. His face, rather vague in the soft light from the hallway, was close to mine. For a minute he didn't speak. He wasn't looking at me. He was looking beyond me, though he wasn't seeing anything at all. I could tell that. "I wonder if—" then he stopped and looked straight at me. His eyes told of an endless yearning for release from pain that knows no words and knows no end. He made a little gesture with his hand. "I wonder if—if—" He braced himself. "Four o'clock?" he said.

"Four."

"I'll be there."

But he wasn't there. The last I saw of him was as he left the hotel, his long body stooped, his swinging strides carrying him out into the night. Alone he went, alone except for the wretchedness of his sensitive soul, a wretchedness leading him, driving him, silently submissive, to its obscure purpose.

## XXIV

James Saxon Childers,  
c/o American Express,  
Calcutta,  
India.

DEAR JIMMY:

I want you to do some work for me. During the three years you wrote for this newspaper I learned your attitude toward anything approximating work; yet I hope you are willing to do a little casual labor.

I have read a number of books on India. Some of them are word spasms on art. Some are theological rhapsodies. Some deal solely with political conditions. Others discuss sexual eccentricities. Still others specialize in dirt and filth. Any one of these subjects is interesting enough within itself, but I want none of them from you. You are going through India for the first time. You know nothing about it. From your virginal point of view, so far as India is concerned, I want you to write some stories for the *Birmingham News*.

Don't bother about politics. Don't tell me about the Taj Mahal. I'm not interested in cow dung. In other words, get rid of your prejudices, your previous ideas about the country. Write in a light and intimate

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

style. Don't stress the sewer motif. Three days ago I read a book on India. After I finished reading it, I took a bath. I thought about what I had read: I took another bath. Don't send me stuff like that.

Sincerely,

C. A. FELL

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•   •

C. A. Fell, Managing Editor,  
The Birmingham *News*,  
Birmingham, Alabama,  
U. S. A.

DEAR CHARLEY:

This morning I was sitting, as Jane Carlyle used to say, "very half-awake over my coffee," when a servant brought your letter. *Merci!*

I landed in Calcutta last night. This afternoon, as soon as the heat abates, I shall go spy out the country for you; though, of course, I shall write nothing until I have traveled considerably and learned something about India. I'll probably send my first story from Benares.

Cheerio—

JIMMY

## XXV

**B**ENARES, INDIA.—I walked on to the platform of the railway station in Calcutta and showed my ticket to a uniformed attendant. His hands went up.

“Sahib!” he said, and I was a little puzzled, for I detected anxiety, annoyance, and helpless compassion in his tone. He motioned, and another attendant came hurrying. They spoke in their native tongue, then turned to me. Would the sahib forgive? But what could they do? They, mere train masters, could do nothing when the gods willed otherwise.

“What could we do, sahib? We explained that there was only one compartment not already occupied by two persons. We explained that you, sahib, one week ago had taken the entire compartment. You had bought it. It was yours, totally yours. But mem-sahib said there was no other way. What could we do?”

I moved a little closer to them, leaned forward, and rather snapped my words. “And what *did* you do?” I demanded.

They made great gestures of resignation. “A thousand thousand pardons, but there was no other way. We were forced to put mem-sahib in the sahib’s compartment.”

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"But you can't do that. You can't put a strange woman in my compartment."

"But she will have a berth on one side of the compartment. Sahib will have the berth opposite, on the other side. It is well, sahib? Say that it is well."

It had to be well, for the whistle blew and the train began to move. My servant and the train master shoved me into the compartment. They slammed the door and locked it. I heard the definite click of the bolt behind me.

She was standing on the far side of the compartment taking off her hat. Her hair was black and her eyes were blue. And she said: "I must apologize for intruding."

I didn't answer; I couldn't.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"And I must apologize"—I caught myself, pulled myself back—"for staring. It's very rude."

She laughed, and I thought of a child I once heard laugh as it rolled a hoop in the Tiergarten of Berlin.

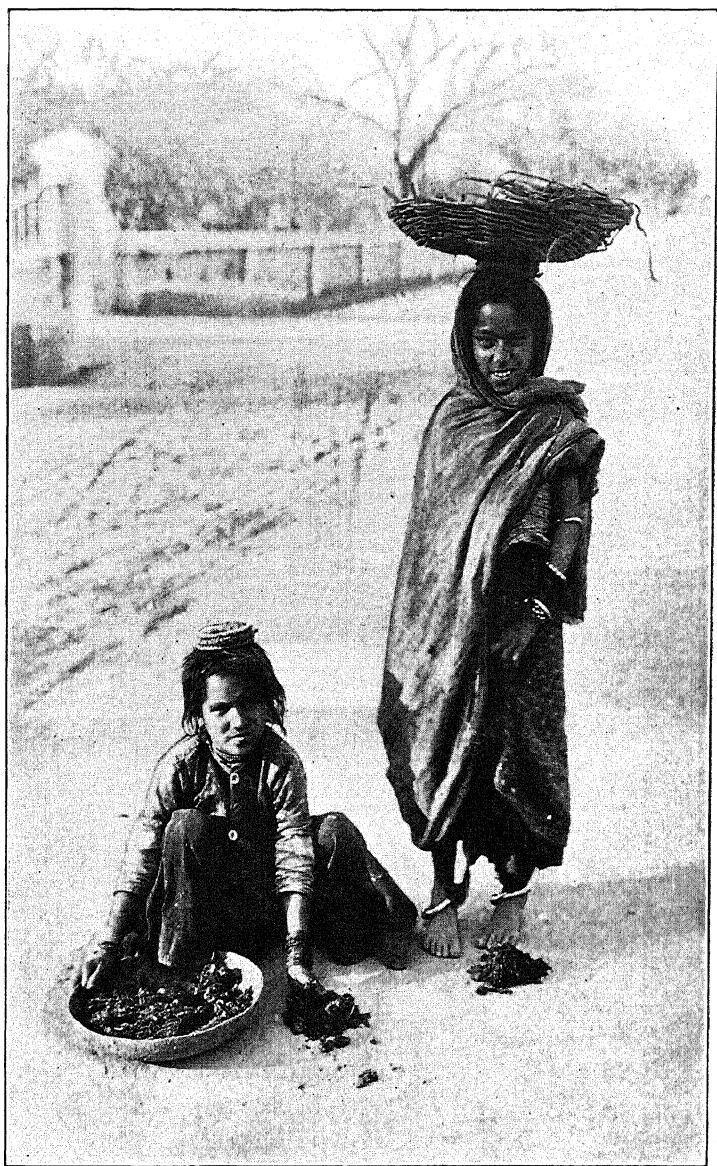
"Naturally," she said, "one would stare at a perfectly strange woman who—"

"I don't mean that. I mean—well, you see, I was expecting some elderly person: Judy O'Grady or the colonel's lady, you know."

"Oh, heavens! I'm far from either. I was born in Erie, Pennsylvania."

"An American!"

"Yes, I'm in India with my father on business. A week ago he left me in Calcutta and went to Benares.



"THE LITTLE SHEPHERDESSES"



## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

This afternoon he came down with fever. I must go to him."

"Of course you must. And I hope you'll consider this compartment all yours; I hope my being here doesn't embarrass you."

"Not at all. In the East we're sensible about these things."

We talked for an hour. Then she took her traveling bag and went into the shower-room. She came back in her kimono. Then I took my traveling bag and went into the shower-room. I came back in my kimono. In the East we are sensible about these things. We told each other good night. I read myself to sleep. Very sensible about these things. . . .

The next morning we arrived in Benares and the girl and I hurried to the hospital where we found her father shaking with fever. I asked if I could help, but she said I couldn't; so I went out to see the city.

Benares is the holy city of the Hindus. Fifteen thousand temples in the town! And swarms of worshipers in every temple. There is the monkey temple where a man beats a gong and shouts, and monkeys come running. One feeds them corn. There is the temple of the bull-god and the temple of the elephant-god, a lopsided idol with a huge eye in the middle of his chest, looking like an illustration from the original edition of Sir John Mandeville's travels.

The pageantry of Benares is like a fantastic Hollywood production. This morning I saw a holy man with his face painted like a circus clown. I saw a

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

young woman with rings on her fingers and rings on her toes, rings in her ears, and rings in her nose. I saw cows everywhere, and, following them, dainty girls, little shepherdesses. They were—

. . .

With all proper respect for you, Charley, and for your position as managing editor, I humbly, but sincerely, say I won't. A dozen times I've started a story, trying to write of India in "a light and intimate vein," but every time the story dwindles out to nothing and I never get beyond the first page.

"Write about India and ignore the dirt and filth," you say. Perhaps some one else can do it, but I can't, for in me, as in Montaigne, smells cause an alteration and work upon my spirits according to their several virtues. Next, you tell me "to ignore the sex motif." How can I? Everywhere I go I bump into gigantic *linghams*, realistically painted, ladies adorning them with marigold and white jessamine, with hibiscus flowers and forget-me-nots. You are not interested in cow dung, you say. Well, it's no hobby of mine, but in India I see it stuck on the sides of houses, little cakes of it drying in the sun, and the dainty maidens, the demure shepherdesses, follow the cow to gather with their naked hands whatever the cow may happen to bequeath.

I do not say that the entire country is peopled by men sexually depraved and physically unwashed; undoubtedly there are as many brilliant minds in India

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

as in America, as much fine blood in India as in England; but, unfortunately, a true understanding is not for me, or for any other white man. Doubtless beneath the seething and contradictory surface of Indian civilization is a mighty harmony, but the Occidental ear is not attuned to it; and to me it is only discord, cacophony.

I'm going to beg off, Charley. I can't write for you. India terrifies me. I mean that. India so utterly confuses me. I reach for this and I reach for that and I grasp nothing. I shall give up trying to understand. God knows I can't understand why Hindus sleep on cement pavements when they could sleep in beds, why their priests eat the heads off living goats, why their holy men squat over fires until they are all blistered behind.

## XXVI

THE Indian snake charmer is an utterly shameless rascal. A pariah both socially and spiritually, he knows no caste, worships no deity, and laughs at the ignorance of those superstitious ones who give him money as he goes his fraudulent way. Cursed by the everliving gods, he swaggers in defiance; and the gods damn him and his brotherhood.

Vishnu, the second of the Hindu trinity, particularly hates him, for Vishnu once was forced to do his bidding. It happened one day as a snake charmer played upon his gourd flute that all the snakes of the forest heard the compelling melody. They came forth and danced, obeying the shrill flute. And one of them had a thousand heads. He, too, danced because his temporary snake nature forced him, but his god-heart was black with hate; for the cobra of a thousand heads was Vishnu the Preserver, who that day had taken the form of a snake. And Vishnu cursed the snake charmer and the snake charmer's sons to all generations.

Wanderers and outcasts, these men roam the earth, their baskets of snakes and their gourd flutes ever with them. They go until they find an assemblage, then place their snake baskets upon the ground, and play

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

the beguiling music which Naga, the holy snake, has declared pleasing to his spirit. Through centuries, tens of centuries, the snake charmer has played upon the *punji*, the hollow gourd with two reeds inserted in the stem, one reed drilled with finger holes, the other a drone. The uninterrupted tonic note and the rude variation of the jungle theme blend into tones plaintive, like those of an oboe played softly.

The ghostly melody mounts to the dwelling of Naga. Pleased, he descends to wake his sleeping children that they, too, may hear. For a time they lie quiet, listening to the strange melody; then its might comes full upon them, and they raise their heads and push off the tops of the baskets. Erect, their hoods widely distended, they stare at the little gourd flute and sway slowly in endless undulations.

Every snake charmer in India will swear that his snake has the death fangs; usually he is lying, for usually the fangs are removed soon after the snake is caught. They may be cut out by the quick twist of a bamboo knife. They may be knocked out with a stick. They may be jerked out by allowing the snake to sink his fangs, which are turned backward like a cat's claws, into a silken cloth that is quickly snatched. But no snake charmer will admit any of this. He knows nothing about extracting fangs. He never heard of it. "Is it really done?" he asks, then devoutly swears that all his snakes have their fangs, that a bite from one of them would bring quick and horrible death.

The snake charmer's favorite swindle is to stage a

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

fight between a cobra and a mongoose. He tells the tourist that the cobra and the mongoose will fight to the death: two dollars for a small snake, five dollars for a large snake. He forgets to tell that all the snakes, regardless of size, have had their fangs pulled, or have been bountifully doped with an opiate.

I saw three of these fights, and I lost my respect for the cobra. I thought that, after all, "Rickey-Tickey-Tavey" wasn't such a brave fellow. When I confessed these doubts to my servant he seemed hurt, but said nothing. Two days later he appeared with a five-foot cobra. He forced it to open its mouth and show the death fangs. He swore that it had not been doped. Then he asked that I go with him to the bazaar where there was a man who owned a mongoose.

We found the old man, the mongoose, a weasel-like little animal colored brown, sitting on his shoulder. For a fee he agreed to fight his pet against the snake. I paid him, and he put his mongoose on the ground.

Its mouth open and dripping, its teeth gleaming like tiny spikes of ivory, the mongoose rushed about until suddenly my servant overturned the basket and the cobra's hood flashed up. Then, save for the tongue of the snake like a stabbing prong, and the heart of the mongoose battering against little ribs, all was still as stone, the snake and the mongoose glaring at each other.

"Mongoose, mongoose, mongoose," crooned the old man.

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

The mongoose moved almost imperceptibly. The head of the snake turned upon its up-reared body. The mongoose moved again. The head of the snake moved. Then once again they were still.

"Mongoose, mongoose, mongoose"—and his voice was soft and low.

The mongoose moved slowly, one step, two steps, the little body all tense. The head of the snake turned; the cobra offered only the threat of its bite and poison.

"Mongoose, mongoose, mongoose." The tempo was quicker. The tone of the old man's voice had risen. "Mongoose, mongoose, mongoose," he called.

The mongoose thrust forward its head. The cobra struck. The mongoose drew to one side, then leapt for the harmless back of the swaying hood. But the cobra spun upon its own body. And again the mongoose was held at bay by that living black rapier.

The mongoose bared his teeth. The cobra struck, fangs parted; but they closed on nothing, and the cobra jerked back. The mongoose seemed to step forward. Again the cobra struck. Again he missed. Again the mongoose seemed to step forward. Again and again and again the cobra struck. Always he missed. And always his striking was weaker, his recovery slower.

"Mongoose, mongoose, mongoose," urged the old man. "Mongoose, mongoose, mongoose," he pleaded.

But the mongoose didn't move, except to bare his teeth and snarl. The cobra struck. He missed. Slowly the tired head went back. It had not fully

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

reached its resting place when again the mongoose snarled. The cobra struck. His head wavered as it went back. The mongoose, giving him no second to rest, moved forward. Again the cobra struck.

And then there was a brown flash, a gleam of white teeth, and the cobra was writhing in fine agony. He whipped his long body. He lashed with his tail. He lifted his head and jerked. He shuddered in great convulsions. But the little spikes of ivory held fast. They held until the struggles of the snake were stilled, until the convulsions of his magnificent body were feeble and spasmodic.

"Mongoose, mongoose, mongoose," sang the old man. "Mongoose, mongoose, mongoose," sounded the soft song of triumph.

The mongoose lifted his head and shook. The body in his jaw was only a bit of black silken rope severed from its vital mooring.

"Mongoose, mongoose, mongoose—"

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This morning I visited a school. As I passed along a hall I glanced into a classroom, then stopped and looked, yearning for the educators of America.

A venerable teacher, his beard white and the ivory baldness of his head crowned by a black skullcap, gripped the ears of a small boy. Periodically he jerked the ears forward and periodically he jerked them backward. In the intervals he clouted the lad on the jaw.

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"Now do you know?" the old man asked, just as the blow struck home.

"No, sir," whined the ignorant one.

"Then"—jerk—jerk—wallop—"perhaps this will help you to learn."

How I longed for the educators of the United States! A little of the old Indian's method of teaching, and considerable less nonsense about "play periods," and our land would bloom and blossom with a great learning.



At the entrance of an Indian hotel are dozens of beggars, peddlers, and conjurors, waiting to prey upon white travelers. At the sight of a tourist they begin their discordant symphony, and the uproar ceases only after the traveler has shoved his way through the mob.

One of the most persistent of these rogues is the man who offers plumes and feathers. As he approaches, he draws forth a single plume, a saber of gold, and marks its languorous beauty through the air. Then the soft and spectral crest of a heron floats over his hand. And then, like a shower of ivory darts, an egret feather bursts from its little imprisoning tube, drawn out quickly by the man who twists it slowly between thumb and forefinger, causing white sparks to fly in a confined circle.

"Buy. Buy," insists the peddler. "Chip. Very chip."

The hotel peddlers, the most unabashed thieves in

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

the world, sell a heron's crest for two dollars, an egret's for three dollars.

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To increase the speed of either bull or buffalo, one breaks the tail of the animal, then catches the lower part of the tail and jerks. This method of acceleration is effectual until a particular breakage becomes immune to pain, though the immunity doesn't seriously trouble the Hindu, who through the centuries has worshiped the bull, for he merely breaks another place and thus begins a new center of torture. The tails of these wretched brutes are lumped and crooked.

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Many persons refer to all Indians as Hindus. The error is keenly resented, for the Hindu is a member of the Hindu religion, and the classification is entirely ecclesiastic, not at all geographic or national. A person who speaks of all Indians as Hindus might as well speak of all Americans as Episcopalians or Catholics or Methodists. The Indian refers to himself as an Indian, and calls the North American Indian a Red Indian.

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A very little jewelry is sufficient, and too much is essentially vulgar. An American or European woman who loads her head and hands with jewels thereby classifies herself: one can be reasonably certain that

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

she bullies her servants and invariably serves champagne. Unfortunately the beauty of a single rope of pearls, of one jade dinner ring, is not recognized in India. Indian men and women burden themselves with jewelry, and the gewgaws of an Indian child are countless.

The coolie who carries your luggage, and his brother who pulls your rickshaw, will have their ears pierced with several holes, a loop of metal, preferably telegraph wire, swinging from each of them. Besides, they will wear two or three bracelets of telegraph wire and half a dozen anklets of the same material.

Many women puncture the cartilage dividing the nostrils and hang rings through the openings; some of the rings are so large that they dangle below the lips and rest upon the chin. Another favorite method of decorating the nose is to cut a small hole in the side of it and sink a diamond or ruby in the flesh.

In Benares I saw a girl with four rings looped from the cartilage of each ear, two pendants swinging from each lobe. The sides of her nose were studded with gems, and three gradated pendants hung from the nostril cartilage. Her fingers were stiff with rings; twenty-four bracelets were on each arm, four anklets on each leg, rings on each toe, and a curious little silver mesh bag on each big toe. She was just a little Indian girl on her way to church.

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

At night one sees hundreds of coolies asleep upon the cement pavement. Occasionally they have a blanket beneath them; usually, though, there is nothing to ease the rigor of their slumber. On cold nights they lie wrapped from head to foot in white sheeting. They look like corpses.

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White prestige must be maintained in India. The native must never learn the truth, never know that the white man, too, can become ragged and hungry and sink to extending the palm. As soon as a European gives evidence of financial or moral disintegration, his passage home is paid and he is persuaded to leave.

## XXVII

DEAR Richebourg McWilliams: The dining-room of the hotel at Agra was crowded; a rush party of tourists was hesitating for the night. I sat alone at one side of the room. Two tables away sat three men and two women. One of the men dominated the dining-room. He was a big man with a loud voice, reddish-blond hair, freckles on his neck, and two upper front teeth of gold.

"I don't see no sense in goin' out to this graveyard," he said.

The synthetic blonde beside him looked up quickly. "Aw, don't say that, Noisy. We got to see the Taj Mahal: it cost fifteen million dollars."

Noisy sucked in a whistle. "That's a lot of dough," he said. "Ain't it a lot of dough?" he asked the table.

For a moment no one answered. Then a man politely said: "Yes."

The reticence of the rest of the table in no wise dampened Noisy's rhetoric. He discussed India, making it plain that he disapproved of many practices in the country. He argued that India should be liberated, then answered his arguments himself. He announced that the steak was lousy. He insisted that stopping

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

a whole night just to see a graveyard was plain crazy.

"Ain't it crazy?" he demanded.

Again the blonde defended the Taj Mahal. The place cost fifteen million dollars! Any place that cost that much was worth taking a look at.

After dinner I was drinking coffee on the veranda of the hotel; two men asked if they might sit down. For a time we chatted. But even above our conversation we could hear Noisy at the far end of the veranda telling his opinion of a guy who'd washed one of Noisy's shirts and busted three buttons off'n it.

One of the men at my table glared. "I'm going to shoot him before the cruise is over," he said.

"I'll buy you a gun to do it with," said the other.

"Who is he?" I asked.

One of the men opened his hand, then closed it. "Just a tough from somewhere," he said. "He and his blonde are on the cruise—that's all we know."

"Except that he makes an infernal nuisance of himself," added the other man. "He knows everything and talks incessantly."

After I finished my cigarette and coffee, I hired a cart and started on the mile drive from the hotel to the Taj. The little pony had joggled about half the distance when a stream of cars swept by me. From one of them a man leaned out. "Hey, bud," he shouted, "this right for the graveyard?" I recognized Noisy's voice and told my driver to go slowly, for I wanted Noisy and his blonde to lose themselves in the grounds of the Taj before I arrived. I had never

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

been there before and I wanted nothing to mar my first visit.



Three centuries ago lived a woman named Mutaz-i-Mahal. The Emperor Shah Jahan loved her and took her for his wife. She bore him thirteen children, then died. Straightway Shah Jahan called for the artists of his own country and sent messengers into distant lands, requesting that designers and builders come to his court. They came, bringing with them their dreams in stone and marble; among them came Master Isa Afandi, the Persian. He showed the emperor a little wooden model with which Shah Jahan was pleased. Twenty-two years later the tomb was completed, and Mutaz-i-Mahal laid in her vault.

Shah Jahan went about the business of state, caring for his people, caring for their property. Without warning, his son fell upon him, took the throne and the crown, and imprisoned Shah Jahan.

On moonlight nights the old man sat on the balcony of his prison, looking out at the sacred Jumma flowing its silver path through the valley, and at the Taj rising milk-white into the heavens. And Shah Jahan dreamed of old unhappy far-off things, and battles long ago. He dreamed, too, of youth and love, of a voice and words in the night. Then one day he ceased to dream. They came and tenderly lifted him. They carried him across the sacred Jumma, over the marble way, and

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

down the marble stairs. They laid him beside Mutaz-i-Mahal.

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There was darkness: not merely the darkness of ordinary night, there was a velvet invisibility. Then the moon, a pale lady wrapped in a gauzy veil, parted the jet curtains and shyly entered the sky. And straightway the trees loosed their sable cloaks and stood forth in silver. And from the shadows there rose, its outline uncertain, an alabaster wraith.

Men say the Taj Mahal is a building made of marble—then the paintings of Giorgione are only pigments smeared on canvas with a brush, and Beethoven's Fifth is merely notes played on the tuba and the bassoon and the violin. For me the Taj Mahal is not a building that can be touched and photographed; it is a partial answer to man's eternal longing for the exquisite rapture attendant upon transcendent beauty.

I feel this divine overtone despite a belief that architecturally the Taj is not a perfect building. There is, perhaps, too great concentration of mass; and this impression of central heaviness is increased by four minarets that rise like needles and contrast too vividly with the great domes. Besides this doubt about the perfection of proportion, there is a feeling that the Taj is too cold, too impersonal in its classic reticence; nor is this coldness overcome by the abundance of carvings, filigrees, and precious stones placed in pat-

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

terns that, unfortunately, do not merge and throb with the life that one feels in the cathedrals of England and old France.

And yet, as one sits in the moonlight, gazing through the lacy veils that rise from the fountains before the Taj, as one sees the dome all washed in silver, one forgets trivial technicalities of mass and proportion, one forgets that this is a tomb built for a woman by a man, one even forgets that the hands of man made it.



A fat and barefooted Indian swung aloft a shutter-lantern that shadowed silhouettes upon the wall: we were climbing upward from the lower vaults, leaving the Emperor Shah Jahan to sleep beside Mutaz-i-Mahal. A great quietness was about me, within me a great peace.

At the entrance of the tomb I turned and looked back, listening for a moment to the song of the centuries, then I descended the outer stairs. I walked beside the fountains that lie between the dual rows of cypress trees. I walked away from the Taj Mahal slowly, for one does not hurry away from a benediction.

As I walked I heard a woman speaking. "Come on," the woman said. "Let's go home."

There was no answer.

"Let's go home, Noisy. We been out here three hours."

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

The voices came from beneath a peepul tree that stretched its shadow toward the silver domes.

“Aw, Noisy, come on. I’m tired and sleepy and—”

“You shut your God damn mouth—” I recognized Noisy’s voice—“I want to look. This place—well, I want to look, that’s all.”

## XXVIII

I WISH, Annette, that you could see my native servant. He is twenty-five years old, his skin is a glowing sepia, his smile is endless, his legs are superbly bowed, his old coat has never been pressed, and his invariable matutinal salutation is "Damn fine morning, sahib, damn fine morning."

In other parts of the Orient a traveler can care for himself, but the surprising Indian standards of cleanliness, comfort, and sanitation, virtually force one to employ a native servant, or "bearer," as he is called. My servant first appears each morning with early tea. After putting the tray on the night-table beside the bed, he draws a bath and lays out linen, places my shoes, which he has shined during the night, beside the dressing stand, then leaves the room to squat outside the bedroom door and wait until summoned. If I desire him to accompany me sightseeing or shopping, he silently salaams; if I ask him about places to visit, he speaks respectfully, never forgetting to salute; if I don't want him, he waits until I depart, then straightens the room. Afterward, he once more takes his place in the hallway and stays there all day. At night he spreads his thin blanket on the marble floor.

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

The bearer is most needed when the European travels, for Indian trains are different from those of other countries; there is no extra provision for night travel. During the day one sits upon the wretchedly hard benches covered with polished leather. At night the bearer spreads over them blankets and sheets he has rented from a travel bureau; there is no other bed. All night the train sweeps across the barren plains of India, and all night the sand drifts into the compartment, getting into one's ears, one's hair, between one's teeth. At the first morning stop, the bearer comes in and brushes away the top layer, then goes into the shower-room, with which every first-class compartment is equipped, and lays out towels and other requisites, absolutely none of which is supplied by the railway company.

In rather an impersonal sort of way I have become a little fond of my bearer. I don't love him as I love my old ducky in Alabama, or Wu, the Chinese rickshaw boy in Peiping who told the doctors: "Master here: Wu here." I don't love him because—I don't know, Annette, I can't explain, but one simply does not get *en rapport* with these Indians.

In Japan I made a number of friends I shall always hold dear. There are a score of Chinese I love. In Siam, in Malay, in Java, in Bali, I felt at ease with men born to be coolies and men born to be kings. I have sat with them and smoked; we made gestures, and parted friends. I can't do that in India; probably

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

it is my fault, but to me there seems a heaven-high wall between Indians and all white men, a wall that began to rise a hundred centuries ago.

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I came to India with a particular desire to see the Indian rope trick. For years I had read of Indian conjurors throwing a rope into the air and causing it to remain taut while a small boy climbed up and disappeared into the cloud. The first conjuror I asked about the rope trick smiled at me, the second laughed, the third swore that the trick could not be done, had never been done, and that only the amazing credulity of the Occident nurtures the rumor.

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Last night beneath my hotel window a dozen Indians sat in a circle and listened to a native expositor chant the news of the day. For a time I tried to sleep, but the rise and fall of that falsetto chant prevented me. I went to the window and asked the natives to adjourn or to chant more quietly. The chanting went on *fortissimo*. Thirty minutes later I again asked courteously for an adjournment. I was ignored. Finally I threw some water. It didn't reach them. Again I tried to sleep, but couldn't. For another thirty minutes I endured it; then I made silent apologies to advocates of international friend-

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

ships, and went to the window once more. Two golf balls missed him, but a soda syphon laid him low.

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An American traveler starts out as "Mister." In Japan he becomes "San." In China he is "Master"; in Indo-China, "Monsieur"; in Malaya, "Tuan"; in the Dutch East Indies, "Den Herr"; and in India, "Sahib."

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Since I have been in India I have seen a number of American tourist parties, and I wonder, Annette, why some Americans go absolutely barbarian once they step upon foreign soil.

Once I saw a lady from Kansas go into a private garden in London and pull roses. I saw a gentleman from Ohio cut a splinter from a beam in Burns's cottage at Ayr. I saw a man from Missouri get up in the middle of Hans Sachs's "Prize Song" and walk out of the Dresden opera house. One afternoon just at sunset I saw a group of men and women on the Acropolis. Two of the men, handkerchiefs laid across their arms, pretended to be Greek waiters and solicited orders for eggs straight-up. One Sunday morning in Rome I saw a carriage dash up to the wall that surrounds the Protestant cemetery, that holy place, and a lady and her daughter step out, peep through the slit in the wall, glancing at the spot where Keats lies, and beside him Severn. "Now," said the daughter, "now

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

that we have done Keats's grave, where do we go?"

One hears a Frenchman or an Italian or a German or an Englishman say: "American." That is all they say and all they need to say. But what can one do? One can not go up and tell them that they are mistaken. "This vandal who pulled flowers in your garden, this barbarian who left the opera house, this bejeweled little wench busy 'doing' the sacred places of the world—they are not Americans as Americans really are. There are one hundred and twenty million Americans back in the United States who wouldn't pull your flowers or leave your opera house. Can't you understand? And I want you to understand; because if you did, America and Europe would be more friendly, and the world would be better off; you yourself, provincial and a trifle humorous in your arrogance, would be tremendously benefited." The European, still provincial and still arrogant, politely accedes, but in his heart he repeats the cherished opprobrium: "American."

In Europe one undoubtedly sees occasional evidence of boorishness in an individual American, exactly as one sees similar evidence in Englishmen or Frenchmen or Germans. In Europe this boorishness is comparatively trivial. In India it is serious, for it shows itself in ridicule of religious practices.

In Bombay last week I saw an American grab the hand of a Hindu child and hold her while another American photographed the sacred vessel she carried.

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

In Lahore I saw an American make the holy caste marks on his forehead with a lip stick, then exhibit himself to his laughing companions and to the horrified priests. In Peshawar I saw an American stop a Mohammedan and ask him to have his wife unveil so that her picture could be taken. In Benares I saw an American stand beside the Ganges, turn up his nose, then spit into the water. . . . I wonder what would happen to a Hindu who came to Birmingham, Alabama, and, in a church, with everybody looking on, turned up his nose, and spat into the baptismal font. And I wonder what was in the hearts of those Hindus who saw my countryman defile the holy Ganges.

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In China one learns to speak pidgin-English, a jargon made up of English words with Chinese syntax, which, after it is once used, forever pollutes the speech, particularly when one addresses an Oriental. One forgets that only the Chinaman of the lower social classes can understand pidgin-English, and one speaks it to any Oriental from the Sultan of Djocjakarta to a Burmese dancing girl. Most of them merely shake their heads, but the Indian, who speaks the best English of all Orientals, usually bows, puts the pidgin-English into good English, then answers the question.

One morning, while my bearer was out on an errand, I rang for the hotel room-boy.

"Sahib?" he queried.

I wanted to know the distance to the Kalighat, the

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

famous Hindu temple. "You savee how far number one Kalighat joss house?" I asked in perfectly simple pidgin-English.

The man's eyebrows snapped together. "Sahib?" he repeated.

"How far joss house? Pagoda—Kalighat—you savee?"

"Oh"—his face cleared—"you wish to know how far is the Kalighat from this hotel? I should say it is about three miles, Sahib." He bowed. "Is that all, sahib?"

"Quite," I said.

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. . .

Most Indians paint mystical symbols upon their foreheads to indicate the sect to which they belong. The followers of Siva draw three horizontal lines, one above the other; the lines are made by clay from the banks of the Ganges, by sandalwood ashes, or by ashes of human bodies. The followers of Vishnu draw three lines at such angles as suggest the footstep of the god. Followers of other gods mark their foreheads with a single black line running from the hair to the top of the nose. Others have one or more red or yellow dots. Still others have markings unmistakably phallic. Holy men paint their faces in amazing fashions, besides smearing their almost naked bodies with ashes and cow dung.

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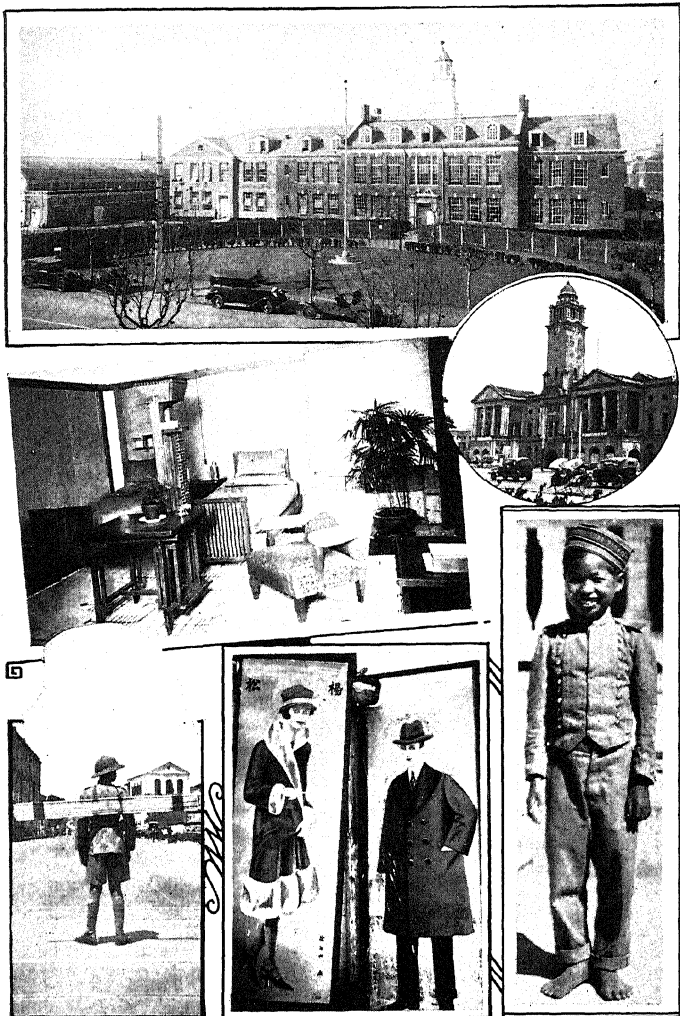
## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

“And now, ladies and gentlemen, before you lies the famous palace of Agra. Those sandstone walls are forty feet thick, seventy feet high, and a mile long. Within them once lived the famous Shah Jahan and his beloved Mutaz-i-Mahal. Within them died the emperor as he sat gazing at the Taj Mahal, the tomb he had built for his favorite wife. Come this way, please.

“You are now passing over a bridge that spans a moat thirty feet wide and thirty-five feet deep. Just follow me, please. We’ll go up this incline. Hurry along: we want to see everything. It’s all part of the tour.

“And now, ladies and gentlemen, we are entering the actual palace of Shah Jahan himself. Here the emperor lived. Here Mutaz-i-Mahal lived and here she was loved by the emperor. At your left are the ruins of the private baths. At your right is the famous promenade. And this, ladies and gentlemen, is the great marble courtyard. See the balcony at that side. There sat the emperor. See the balcony at this side. There sat honored guests. They looked down at dancers and musicians, and from those balconies they played the game of chess.

“A strange game it was when the emperor played chess. At his signal, slave girls came forth. They wore cloths of gold, and cloths of silver, and silks of brilliant hue. There a girl with a black miter upon her head. There a girl with headdress of ivory carved like the head of a horse. Eunuchs led them forth.



# THE ORIENT OCCIDENTALIZED

*Top: A school in Shanghai.*

*Center left: My bedroom in a Japanese hotel.*

*Center right: Theater in Singapore.*

*Lower left: Singapore traffic policeman.*

*Lower center: A Chinese tailor's advertisement outside a shop in Peiping.*

*Lower right: A Siamese bell boy.*



## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

"Sixteen girls were placed on the marble squares before the emperor, sixteen before the guest. The emperor called his move. The guest called his move. The strange game went on. As each piece was lost, the little slave girl salaamed until her forehead touched the marble floor, then withdrew to that part of the courtyard over there—right over there, lady.

"After many moves had been made, the guest called: 'Queen's Bishop's pawn takes.' The emperor leaned back, and laughed, and patted his sides. 'King's Bishop to the Queen's Knight's fifth—and check,' he called. The guest studied the board. Long he looked down, but, at last, he rose and bowed to the emperor. 'It is check,' he said.

"The emperor laughed and demanded another game. 'Perhaps,' he said, 'my pretty slave girls troubled you. Perhaps you saw them, and their symmetry and their beauty, and you forgot the game. Perhaps they caused you to think of more pleasant pastimes than a game of chess. If they did, we will change the pieces.' The emperor turned to his chamberlain and spoke. The man salaamed and withdrew.

"Slaves brought sherbets and sweetmeats. Musicians played softly. The emperor and his guest sat in silence, planning their attacks. And the sun beat down on the courtyard. And there was no stirring of air except from the fans of peacock feathers waved by giant slaves.

"Then the doors of the dungeons opened, and there sounded the clank of chains. Naked men with chains

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

about their ankles struggled into the courtyard. Thin whips curled through the air and bit the naked flesh.

"Quickly the chamberlain placed the prisoners upon the squares where you, ladies and gentlemen, are now standing. Sixteen prisoners he placed before the emperor, sixteen before the guest. Each man was costumed for his part: upon the head of one was a black miter; upon the head of another, a piece of ivory carved like the head of a horse. The chamberlain retired. Soldiers passed before the chained men, giving each a short sword. And straightway the emperor leaned over the balcony.

"'Pawn to the Queen's fourth,' he called.

"The guest called his move; the emperor called his. Then the guest called: 'Queen's Bishop takes pawn.' Immediately the prisoner who wore the insignia of the Queen's Bishop began to drag his chained feet toward the square of the waiting pawn. The square there, lady—that one—yes, that's right. The pawn turned to face him. The Queen's Bishop drew nearer, came this way, directly by where you are standing, sir. He held his sword before him. Nearer he came, and his sword rose. And the sword of the pawn rose. Then they crashed together. Two naked men with chains about their ankles were fighting for a square in a game of chess.

"With a quick jab the Queen's Bishop thrust. The pawn warded the blow. He tried to leap forward, but the chains weighted him, held him. He tried to balance himself. His throat became exposed, and

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

then his throat and chest were scarlet. For an instant he stood, then his legs were limp; he settled slowly to the chains and to the crimson flow that widened there upon the square where you are standing, lady.

“‘Pawn to the Queen’s fifth,’ called the emperor.

“And that, ladies and gentlemen,” said the guide, as he took out a handkerchief and wiped his face, “was how they played chess in this marble courtyard; though I don’t see how—it’s too hot. Goodness knows to-day is certainly a burner. And now, if you please, just follow me. Come this way. I’ll show you a room with golden walls and precious stones in the ceiling and—come along, sir, come along. You’ll hold us back.”

I realized he was addressing me. “If you don’t mind,” I said, “I’ll just stay here.”

“But you won’t see the room with the golden walls and precious stones in—”

“I’ll wait, if you don’t mind, here in this marble courtyard. It is a hot day.”

## XXIX

THEY were two drunken American sailors ashore in Calcutta. I met them coming out of the marketplace. They were carrying a chicken coop full of monkeys that they had bought for their girls in Hoboken, New Jersey.

"Hey, buddie—you an American?" asked one.

"Sure," I said.

"Then come have a drink," said the other, dropping his side of the coop. "What the hell's the use in not having a drink?"

I didn't have anything else to do, and the idea of having a drink with two sailors rather appealed to me. We started from the marketplace. One sailor said his name was McClung; the other said his was Sandgreen.

"What about the monkeys?" I asked, as we walked away.

"What monkeys?" Sandgreen asked.

McClung slowly turned around and steered a wavering course back to the chicken coop. He pulled open the little door and watched the monkeys race out and scurry away; then he started toward Sandgreen and me, his knees rising high and his heels hitting hard. "Wait till they grow up to be baboons," he said. "Then we'll come back and get 'em."

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

We hired a taxi, and Sandgreen got in first. He had on dungarees, a white shirt, blue tie, and a khaki helmet. McClung wore white trousers, a white shirt open at the throat, and a cap. They were as powerful men as I had ever seen, particularly Sandgreen: he was a Swede of five feet, ten inches, weighing two hundred pounds.

We went to the Nagasaki Tea House, a dive run by a Japanese and patronized by British troopers and sailors of all nations. McClung and Sandgreen bought drinks for everybody inside, then went to the door and called out invitations to the public. They drank quantities of beer spiked with two quarts of whisky. Suddenly Sandgreen decided he wanted to see the city.

He tacked for the door, and by devious routes made it. McClung and I followed. Outside we climbed into a taxi and for three hours we rode, touring Calcutta. Several times the driver stopped, pointed at the meter, and said: "Pay, sahib. Pay money," but Sandgreen would wave him on, telling him not to worry about money: "Buy you a new taxi, if you don't like this one, you squint-eyed walrus."

At ten o'clock at night the driver turned to the side of the road and stopped. He pointed to the meter. I leaned over and saw that it registered exactly fifty rousees.

"Pay, sahib," the man said. "Money."

"Aw, go on," Sandgreen said. "Go on before I bust you one."

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

The driver mumbled something I couldn't understand.

"If we Swedes had this country we'd chop your bloody heads off," Sandgreen announced. "Go on, I tell you."

"White man no good," said the driver.

I reached for my purse. "Let's pay him; then we can get another taxi. If he wants—"

"Don't pay him nothin'. We'll pay him when we get through ridin'. We'll buy him a new taxi."

And then the driver signed his death warrant. "Englishman no good," he said.

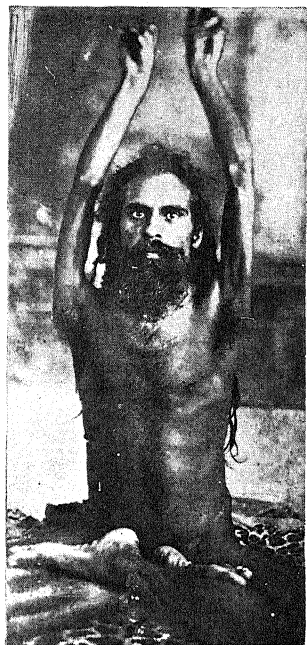
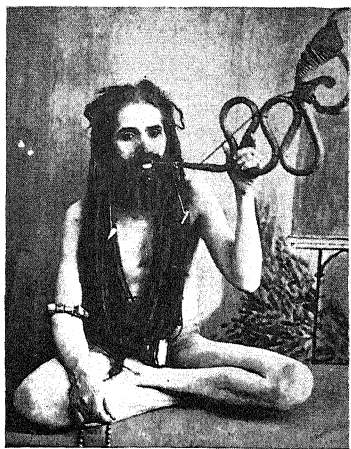
McClung shot from the back seat as if springs had thrown him. "Who the hell you callin' an Englishman?" he said. "I'm an Irishman and I'll beat your no-good brains out." McClung dragged the man from the car, held him by the throat with his left hand, and smashed his face with his right fist. "Call me a bloody Englishman, will you?" he said, as the driver crumpled to the pavement.

Where they came from I'll never know, but that Hindu taxi-driver had no sooner hit the pavement than we were surrounded by a mob of jabbering, gesticulating natives. They shouted and waved their arms, and over their heads I could see scores of other natives running toward us.

"We better get out of this," I said to Sandgreen. "We better get out of it fast."

"Hell, no," he said. "I like it. I like it lots."

A Hindu darted forward and stuck his face close



## HINDU HOLY MEN

*Upper left: The longer the hair, the nearer he is to heaven.*

*Upper right: He has held his arms over his head so long that he can never lower them: thus he attains salvation.*

*Lower left: In India there are five million others just like him.*

*Lower right: This holy man has a peculiar idea about the physiological location of the soul.*



## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

to Sandgreen, speaking rapidly. Sandgreen stared at him, glassy-eyed. The man kept on talking and pointing at the Hindu sprawled on the pavement. The Swede seemed rather puzzled; then slowly his face cleared and he began to laugh. And as he laughed he shot out his great fist and hit the Hindu in the mouth. I heard a squashing sound, and I pledge you the Hindu traveled six feet before he collapsed to the pavement.

The crowd roared its fury. Sandgreen laughed and shouted for them to come on. A man got too near McClung, and McClung hit him below the left ear. The Hindu sank to the pavement as if his legs had suddenly turned to water. The crowd closed in on us. I saw one man with a knife and I called out to Sandgreen. He leapt upon the Hindu, caught his arm, and jerked it backward. The knife fell to the pavement. Another Hindu stooped for it. McClung kicked him in the face and the fellow sprawled. Sandgreen still was laughing as he forced the Hindu's arm up his back until something cracked; then Sandgreen gave the man a shove and he fell with his arm lying at a grotesque angle beside him. McClung slugged three Hindus who kicked at his groin. Sandgreen laughed, crashing his fists about.

Six native policemen fought their way through to us, and a moment later two English police clubbed their way through. Then a siren sounded and a riot car carrying eight English policemen armed with automatics swirled to a stop at the edge of the mob. With guns drawn, the Englishmen joined the circle

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

of native police guarding us, and the mob fell back.

But Sandgreen was not satisfied. Still laughing, he struggled to break through the police and get at the Hindus. The police tried to quiet him. He wouldn't be quieted; he struck at the police. Finally the signal was given and one of the native officers raised his club to knock Sandgreen out. McClung saw the club go back; with his left hand he caught the policeman's beard, and with his right hand he broke the policeman's nose. Instantly the other officers leapt upon us and held us until the patrol came and carried us away.

Sandgreen's shirt was completely torn from him. McClung was bleeding from the mouth; one of his knuckles was split. My left arm was numb from a blow above the elbow and blood was running from a cut in my left leg.

"McClung," said Sandgreen, "they were too damned easy. All we did was tap 'em."

"Too damned easy," agreed McClung.

During the remainder of the ride, Sandgreen and McClung bemoaned the Hindus' failure to fight, deplored the interference of the police. They were still grumbling when the car stopped, the door opened, and a squad of native police escorted us through the outer gate of a prison. We were led along a stone passage and down a long flight of worn steps that took us fifty feet underground. There was no light except the rude flare of kerosene torches that the guards held above their heads and that splotched heavy shadows upon the walls.

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

"I'm McClung," announced the Irishman, as we entered the receiving room and were met by an English officer of police. "McClung, seaman from *The Far Ranger* docked at Kittapour docks with a cargo of Manchurian nuts from Darien and tin from Singapore. I want to get out of here."

"And I'm Sandgreen," announced the Swede. "And I want to get out of here."

The English officer looked at me. "And who are you?" he asked.

"Never mind," I said. "But I'd dashed well like to get out of here, too."

"We'll see about that to-morrow," he said. "You've already caused enough trouble for one night."

The native sergeant of police finished searching us. "Come along," he said. "Come this way."

The prison was built six hundred years ago by an old Mohammedan ruler. I saw dozens of cells filled with prisoners, some of them in chains. Near the end of the corridor the guard unlocked a huge door and put us all in the same cell.

"Now I know how them monkeys felt," said McClung, as the door shut behind him.

"What monkeys?" Sandgreen asked.

The cell was eight feet square, totally unlighted, and with only some straw scattered in one corner. There was a stifling stench, for there was no sanitation of any kind; yet within ten minutes Sandgreen and McClung were snoring in lusty sleep. I made the best I could of it, and at daybreak I saw that the

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

stone walls of the cell were thirty feet high. Twenty feet from the cell floor was a small opening, heavily barred, through which came a little light and a little air.

At seven o'clock the guards passed along the corridor. They opened a trap in the door of each cell, poured some dry yellow meal into a trough and handed in some fresh water. That was our breakfast. At lunch they gave us more meal, more water, and a horrible shriveled fish that stank to heaven. At four o'clock in the afternoon the captain of *The Far Ranger* came to the jail and offered bail for Sandgreen and McClung. The English captain of police was kind enough to allow me to make bail for myself. At the door of the prison I shook hands with the two seamen and bade them good-by.

Three days later we met in court. Sandgreen was fined one hundred rousees. McClung was fined fifty rousees. I was fined ten rousees. "I am fining you," said the native magistrate, "according to the relative damage each of you did."

"What's that?" said McClung.

"I'm fining you according to the damage each of you did. Sandgreen I fine one hundred rousees. McClung I fine fifty rousees."

Four native policemen caught McClung just in time. "You can't insult me, you bloody banshee," McClung shouted.

"Court is adjourned," said the magistrate, and retired.

### XXX

REMBHA the dancer was born as the gods stirred the waters, searching for immortality. Born of the foam of the waters, as light as foam she dances before Indra, god of the firmament; queen of the Apsarases, heavenly dancers of Mount Meru, she is goddess of the Indian nautch girl.

Ages ago Rembha came down from Mount Meru, and with her came the other Apsarases. They were cared for by Chandra, god of the moon, and Kama, god of love. As the Apsarases journey over the land, teaching mortals to dance, the Gandharvas, the sixty million sons of Brahma, heavenly singers born imbibing melody, saw them and loved them. And the heavenly dancers married the heavenly singers, and their children married demigods, and their grandchildren married mortals, and so the nautch girl was born.

"It's a good story, old boy," I said to my host in Bombay, "but there is a similar one about Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, at whose touch flowers spring forth, and for whom the Graces weave sweet-smelling garlands, and in whose girdle lurks that loving converse that steals the wit of even the wise. The story is dear enough, but the modern maid of Athens

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

is not—speaking frankly—so compelling. By any chance has this same moldiness crept over the modern daughter of Rembha?"

My host put his glass aside. "Do you know," he said, "I've never seen a real nautch girl, and I've been in India five years."

"I can't understand it," I said. "I left home with a keen desire to see the geisha girl of Japan and the nautch girl of India; there is almost as much poetry in dreaming of one as in dreaming of the other. In Japan the little geisha, adorable creature, is everywhere, but in India the nautch girl is almost legendary; one never sees her."

"The tourist seldom does," my host agreed, "but they are here, plenty of them. The maharajahs have them around their palaces to dance and sing and answer their various wants. In southern India there are dancing girls in the temples, *deva-dasis* they are called, who are servants of the gods, who dance twice each day, fan the idol with Tibetan ox tails, and carry the holy light in the temple procession; besides these, they have other sacramental duties: they answer the amorous urge of the god whenever it is manifested by one of the priests; they are, in reality, harlots and little more. The institution of temple prostitution is a thoroughly rotten one, but it is limited to a very small part of India and enlightened Indians are making noticeable headway in their efforts to abolish it."

"But," I said, "I can't become a maharajah, and I have no desire to become a priest, not even an Indian

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

priest, yet I sincerely want to see a nautch girl dance. How do I go about it?"

"I've no idea," my host replied.

Three days later I asked another friend. He had no idea. A third and a fourth person were unable to tell me how to find a nautch dancer. So I called my servant and set out on a pilgrimage to that part of Bombay given over to ladies of no virtue, reasoning that among them should be one who could dance me a nautch.

At the end of a long street my servant and I stepped from our taxi. We were greeted in nineteen different languages, none of which I understood, and by nineteen different gestures, all of which I understood. I passed on. Before one house sat a little girl whose skin was tinted like the blossom of the wild strawberry; she spoke to me in Arabic. Across the way, and from a balcony, sang a woman of Ethiopia, her hair coarse and untamed, her skin like sable, and two pearls swung from her ears. From the mouth of an alley a brown woman motioned to me; her silken trousers were blue and her bolero was scarlet. A Chinese woman in a lighted doorway beckoned and called out: "Can do. Can do."

I walked along the middle of the narrow street and my servant walked from group to group, always asking for a woman who could dance the nautch. For half an hour he searched, then found a man who knew such a woman. We followed him through dark streets and alleys until he stopped before a doorway and mo-

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

tioned us to go inside. We climbed three flights of smelly stairs and came to a balcony. Beyond an open door was a room in which sat nine men and one woman.

Her hair, blue in its blackness beneath the light, shone with a heavy gloss. The nails of her fingers and the nails of her toes had been touched with henna. Her lips were red, and her eyelids were lustrous with kohl. Saffron made golden her skin. Mingled with scented oils of olives and coco-palms and sandalwood, there rose from her body the heavy scent of ambergris and musk, of frangipani and attar of roses. Her silken sari was blue, silver threads woven into it, small mirrors sewed upon it. There were bracelets upon her arms, jewels in her ears, and from her nose hung a loop of gold.

A man rose and bowed to me. He pointed to a place on the floor. I sat down and he passed me a carved box in which was betel, areca-nut, and lime; he passed me cigarettes.

At one side of the room sat the orchestra: one man played the *tabla*, the hand-drum; another, the Indian flute; a third played the *sitar*, a stringed instrument. There was a second sitar, played by an old man whose beard was white and plentiful; just above the soft beauty of his beard, two empty sockets showed in his gaunt skull. The head of the old man wavered ceaselessly, except when he played; then it lay upon his sitar like a venerable caress.

The primitive melody was untroubled by contrapuntal harmonies. With a slow cadence the theme

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

evolved, dissolved, repeated itself. And as the flute and sitar sang the songs of ancient India, and the drums sounded their insistent beat, the woman bound her ankles with ropes from which hung scores of bells; and when she had fastened the ropes, she stood erect. Looking at no one, she raised her arms slowly until they were above her shoulders; and all in an instant she was no longer a woman, but a statue in bronze. Her body tense, her eyes locked, there was no motion except that periodically one finger-tip quivered, one eyebrow tilted. Long she stood like an image from the temple, then gently she tapped one foot, and sounded her ankle bells. At first the bells murmured like fairy chimes in far-off chorus; then the set chord swelled and swelled and swelled until, like endless thunder, it closed in and pressed. And suddenly the woman was all motion, all a furious whirl. Her naked feet struck the floor in quick explosions, her arms were circles of grace, her body a pivot of passion. But only an instant she danced in ecstatic torment; then once more she was tense, her eyes locked, one finger-tip quivering.

The flute and the sitar sang softly and the drum was a faint pulsation. Motionless the woman stood, until the flute and the sitar drifted into a dream melody, slow, like an old man praying. Then the bells sounded softly and the body of the woman swayed and sank in rapturous circles until at last she knelt. Kneeling, her body rigid, no muscles moved; then her eyebrows moved, dancing in exciting languor. And

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

then her eyebrows were still and her hips dreamed with the sitar and the flute and the drum; they dreamed a voluptuous reverie, pleaded in amorous eloquence.

From the body of the woman rose the perfume of ambergris and musk, of frangipani and attar of roses. The room was close and I was rising with Rembha from the foam; like foam I was floating with her to Mount Meru. I saw the Apsarases dancing before the god Indra. I knew the heavy drug of sensual beauty. . . . My servant touched me. The dance was ended.

In the passage outside the room, an old woman, her face all wrinkled and skin limp at her throat, appeared with a candle. She held it above her head and led us along the balcony. Twice she turned to speak, and twice she said nothing. We descended the stairs. At the outer door she put her hand on my arm, her old withered face close to mine.

"Once, sahib, me nautch. Me dance, sahib, like—" She broke off into Hindustani. And as she babbled, she tried a dance step. She began it, but it ended grotesquely, for the joints were full of pain; the aged legs refused the rhythm that beat in her burning memory. She fell back against the door. "Money, sahib," she pleaded. "Money, money."

## XXXI

**D**EAR CLIFF PATON: I wonder if you remember a certain afternoon back in the summer of 1922. We were very quiet as we dressed in the tent beside the Thames at Henley. And later we all grinned rather sickly as we swung the little Worcester College racing shell high overhead, then put her in the water. I shall never forget the cries from the punts packed beside the booms, nor the long row down to the starting point, nor Number 3 in the Clare College boat from Cambridge, who smiled and nodded and said, "Good luck" just before the referee called us forward to row, asked if we were ready, then fired his gun.

After that I can remember the slow, steady crouch over the stretcher, the drop of the oar into the water, and the drive back. I remember our coxswain, little Peppin, huddled in the stern, calling the numbers. I remember the roar from far up the river, how it grew louder, then lulled as we swept in between the booms, and suddenly disappeared altogether—and there were only two crews giving stroke for stroke.

But most of all, Cliff, I remember, and I suspect that you remember, the last two hundred yards. Clare was winning back the few feet we had won early in the race, winning them back by inches. One could

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

hear the thump of their oars in the locks, the silken swish of their boat as it cut through the water, the shrill cry of their coxswain calling the numbers. We got excited. We tried to quicken the stroke. We lashed out with our oars, and chopped the water. Clare came up faster; she was almost level, and still she gained.

Yet never did Billy Barton change his long even swing. Never did he change his rate of striking. Coolly he held his stroke. And suddenly we all settled to the rhythm he demanded. We crouched steadily over the stretcher, dropped our oars, drove back; steadily out, drop, hard back; steadily—and then we were over the line, and were trying to sit erect long enough to see whose number went up; and our number went up.

To-day in my library back in Alabama there hangs an oar with a black cross on a pink blade. Sometimes I look at it, and at the names painted on it, and I remember how one boy whipped not only the enemy crew, but the seven men behind him, who tried to get out of control.

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“I tell you,” said Billy Barton, “that you’re insane to want to see Kalighat.”

“And I tell you I’m going,” I answered. “I’ve been in Calcutta a week. All you’ve done is give me marvelous meals, take me to clubs, and drive me around

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

the city. So far as I know, so far as I've seen, Calcutta is very little different from London."

"But Kalighat is—"

"Very well, it is—but take me there."

Long years ago Kali was killed by order of the gods. She was chopped exceedingly fine by the discs of Vishnu and nothing escaped the destroying knives except one of her fingers that slipped through the discs and fell into a jungle where for ages it lay unnoticed. When it was discovered, a wealthy man built a temple over it, honoring Kali and her finger: that's how Kalighat came to be.

Barton and I arrived at the place at eleven o'clock in the morning. The sun melted and dripped slowly upon us. Sacred cows and sacred bulls shifted about the stone yard of the temple; proof of their presence through the years rose pungently. Blind beggars, beggars without noses, beggars with running sores, rubbed themselves against us and pleaded for alms.

A priest saw us and charged through the crowd of worshipers kneeling before the image of Kali. He scattered devotees on the right hand and on the left, clearing a passage that we might get a good glimpse of the holy image; which, after I got, I didn't want. He showed other images that reminded me of Parisian postcards. He pointed out a group of men squatting about a small brazier upon which a wood fire burned. Repeatedly they put their fingers to the flame, then touched themselves.

"Fire worshipers," said the priest.

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

He led us into a small courtyard in time to see a man grab a goat by the hind leg, swirl it into the air, and drop its neck into the forks of a wooden post. Another man shoved a peg through two holes in the post, thus locking in the bleating head. A priest tossed some holy water on the neck, lifted a great meat cleaver, and brought it down—a soft murmur, and the eyelids of the goat were slowly closing. The body was thrown aside. An old woman grabbed up the head and began to gnaw it. . . . Since I had eaten only coffee and toast for breakfast, I might have made it all right if I hadn't seen a beautiful young woman drop upon her knees, brush away green flies, and wipe her lips and tongue in the blood.

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After Billy and I once started, we did rather well, visiting the Eden Gardens, the Indian Museum, Victoria's Museum, a perfect mate for that architectural scarecrow of her consort's in London, and the celebrated Jain Temples, which, like many other temples in India, are so monstrously decorated and elaborately adorned that unity, essential to beauty, is shattered into a thousand fragments of stone and color.

Through the centuries India has been influenced by Aryan, Dravidian, Turk, Iranian, Scyth, Mongol, and by cross breedings of them all. These national and political influences have corrupted the purity of Indian art and show horribly in scores of mongrel temples and palaces. The cathedrals of Europe are made

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

up of nave and transept, of colored glass and carved figures, of columns and towers and a hundred component parts; but each cathedral is a precious unity and each part is but a note that rose from the devout throat of medieval churchmen who worshiped partly in stone; each cathedral, as Goethe remarked, is a frozen symphony. Because Indian art lacks this unity it frequently impresses one as a mosaic of contradictory pieces that do not make a picture. In a room of red-and-gold ceiling the lower part of the wall is decorated with a conventional flower design done in green; above is a frieze of pederastic monkeys. The bronze statue of a god, its belly spotted yellow, stands between a carving of a white elephant and a row of phallic symbols; the god has forty arms, the elephant ten trunks, and each phallic symbol is a mighty boast.

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After three days of tourist life, Billy and I gave up. In the morning he carried on with his duties, and I wandered through side streets and little shops. In the afternoons we went for drives, or took tea with some one, or visited the rowing club, where we changed into shorts and rowed leisurely down the river, Billy keeping the stroke long and even.

The night I left Calcutta I had dinner at Barton's home. At the table were three of his friends, two of them army men. Four Mohammedans, great bulky fellows with fierce beards, waited on us; Barton conversed with them in Hindustani. After dinner the

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

punkahs waved slowly over our heads, and we smoked, drank our brandy, and talked.

"One of my men snuffed it this afternoon with cholera," Billy said.

"There's cholera down our way," another man said.

"Dysentery is doing for us," said one of the army men. "Five good lads in my company are down with it."

"Do they get over it?" I asked.

"Sometimes they do, though it's not unusual for them to snuff it."

I remember that I straightened in my chair, sat more erect. "But doesn't all this sudden sickness, this sudden death, get your nerves?"

No one was quick to answer. One man smiled, and another spread his hands. Barton finished his brandy. "I don't know," he said. "Probably it does, but there's nothing you can do about it. A man does his job, that's all."

It's a long way, Cliff, from an English lad in a racing shell holding the stroke steady at Henley, to an Englishman doing his job in India. It's an awfully long way, but it's the fine way so many of you men travel. And that night in Calcutta I believed I partly understood Wellington's remark about Waterloo being won on the playing fields of Eton; I almost believed that I understood what you chaps mean by "The British Empire."

## XXXII

**M**Y DEAR JIM CHAPPELL: The bazaars of smaller Indian cities are the most fascinating market-places in the world. In them one sees men from the hills and from the plains, with turbaned heads and shaved heads, tattooed faces and painted faces, dressed in robes of scarlet and no robes at all. Veiled women in white walk beside women in saris of green and red and yellow; the skin of one woman is like a lily when it is young, of another like a magnolia blossom after it has been touched. The swarming buyers in their bright costumes look like the rainbow all broken up and boiling.

Tradesmen and craftsmen, their goods spread before them, tirelessly urge the purchase of silks, brassware, cloths, jewels, spices, grains, flowers, carvings, birds, fruits, tapestries, shawls, dried foods. Dust from the feet of men rises upward and mingles with dust from the feet of elephants and camels. Bracelets and anklets clink and clatter and the cries of dealers, buyers, and animal-drivers, blend into the rude symphony of Oriental commerce. And the sun swings low and burns with a cruel force.

The bazaars in larger cities are less picturesque, for they are merely collections of small shops all under one

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

roof, like a municipal market in an American city. The cement floors and aisles are frequently sprinkled and swept. There is only an occasional uproar, and no elephants at all.

In these bazaars are roving salesmen working on commission for all shops. Immediately a European appears, the commission agents fight each other and sometimes fight the European in an effort to act as escort and thus earn a few pennies. Besides the peripatetic salesmen, there are barkers in front of each shop who likewise specialize on Europeans. Whenever they see one, they hurry to him, salaam, and ask him into the shop, promising him a present. I have been offered everything from a golden turban to a brightly decorated bit of bedroom crockery, for the barkers figure it is worth anything to get a European inside, knowing that the angel had more chance with Jacob than the European has with them.

Public porters, almost as persistent as Indian beggars, combine with the commission salesmen and barkers to make the European's visit to the bazaar an ordeal. Whenever a European appears, the porters rush to him and implore his patronage. If he waves them aside they drop back; then each man in turn advances and exhibits a numbered brass check upon his sleeve which indicates that he has been licensed and that, so long as you are watching him closely, he can be trusted.

A foreigner who buys nothing can keep the porters at a distance, but once he has bought even a package

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

of pins, they swarm about him and will not be denied. They get in his way and he has to walk around them. They push and whine and snatch until finally he surrenders and hands over his package of pins. The nearest man grabs it, solemnly places it in the center of a huge basket, puts the basket on top of his head, and, at a distance of three paces, follows the European back to the hotel.

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An Indian and I were joking about cleanliness in each other's country. I brought my favorite accusations and for each of them he had a countercharge. Finally I cited what I thought a most unpleasant habit of the Indians.

"Yes," he admitted, "but you Occidentals have a habit even more unpleasant. You carry handkerchiefs, use them once, then use them again." He shuddered. "It is horrible."

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Burning ghats are places where bodies of orthodox Hindus are cremated. The most holy ones are beside the Ganges at Benares; they are recesses cut into the bank of the river and floored with stone.

A body is first dipped into the river, then placed upon a pile of wood, sacred butter thrown over it, and the wood lighted. If the body doesn't burn fast enough, young men pry it up with poles so that the flames can do their work more easily. While the cre-

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

mation goes on, the death band plays its wild discords, holy men crouch and stare, beggars besiege tourists, and small lads skip about in hilarious games of tag.

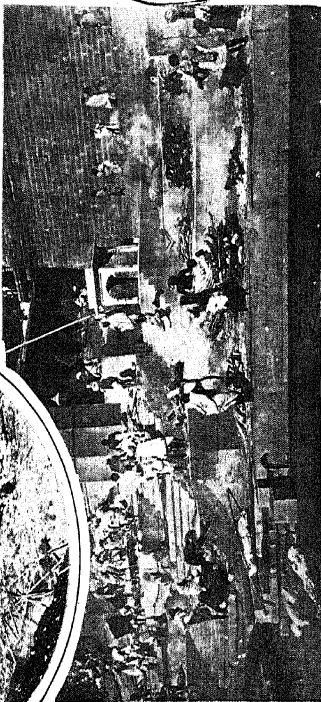
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Three mornings ago I almost missed an early train: I had ordered my servant to bring me breakfast at seven o'clock and it was not brought until seven-thirty, and then by a strange man. When I arrived at the station my servant was waiting for me; I'm afraid my remarks were a little unkind, though after I had spoken I was sorry.

The next day I was still more sorry, for after telling the story to a friend I learned that my servant should not have been censured. He is a Hindu and could not have defiled himself by touching the food I was to eat. It was necessary for him to search until he could find a Mohammedan and send him in with my food.

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When I arrived in Bombay, Jim, I found several letters from you. In all of them you asked about the political unrest in India. I'm sorry, but I can answer none of your questions. I should be impertinent were I to try, for I know very little about Indian history, virtually nothing about Indian people, and absolutely nothing about the actual, the unpublished, dealings between Indian leaders and their English overlords. Nor can I recommend any book that will tell actual condi-



## THE BURNING GHAT BESIDE THE HOLY GANGES

*Upper left: A half-consumed body.*

*Upper right: Workmen turning over a body to speed the burning.*

*Lower left: A picture taken from a boat on the river.*

*Lower right: At the beginning of a cremation: the fire has just been lighted. At the lower right another body awaits its turn.*



## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

tions. The volume recently written by a woman which has furnished most Americans with their ideas of Mother India is as unkind, as unfair, as prejudicial as any book I ever read. Virtually every other book about India is partisan, either pro-British or pro-Indian. Furthermore, almost none of the stories that get into American newspapers can be fully believed: they have passed over entirely too much water not to have been craftily diluted.

Yet even if you could believe all the books and all the newspapers, you still couldn't understand. In India there are great beauty from the past, a fine determination in the present, and a noble dream for the future; at the same time there are starvation, depravity, and decay. In India divine beauty springs from a foundation of filth like a flower from a dung-hill; the most noble chastity exists in the same temple with professional immorality. Added to these bewildering contradictions are all the group hatreds, religious, racial, national, class, and their petty subdivisions, flourishing throughout the country.

In the face of such confusion, no Indian or Englishman dares indicate how best to solve the mighty riddle; none of them knows what is best for India, England, and the world. You will, therefore, appreciate my absolute sincerity when I say that it would be impertinent for me, or any other transient, to attempt to discuss India and her political problems.

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

You have asked me, too, about Gandhi. I can tell you nothing: he is as much an individual puzzle as India is a national perplexity. Yet I am willing to risk a prophecy: I believe that within one hundred years Gandhi will be the God of the East. As you know, he claims no greater divinity than he concedes to other men; but if one considers his life, one sees that Gandhi has all the qualities required for a god. There are needed only a few disciples to come after his death, pick up his teachings, add to them, misinterpret them, read dogma into them, endow the dogma with divinity, then declare that he is the one for whom all mankind has been waiting: thus men create their gods.

Notice the symbol that Gandhi has given. In India the great curse of the country is unemployment. Gandhi is giving employment: he is giving the spinning wheel. In place of the militant crescent and the submissive cross, in place of the inarticulate prayer-wheel and the disjunctive caste marks, Gandhi is giving a spinning wheel, a symbol of industrialism, the new world-religion that has been waiting for a symbol.

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One morning in Delhi I wanted to photograph a magnificent holy bull. This fellow, after the manner of his kind, was casually wandering along the pavement, shoving his head into shops to pick up whatever food he could reach. When I first saw him he was stretched so far into a doorway that I couldn't focus

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

him in my lens. The shopkeeper saw my difficulty and very accommodately cracked the sacred bull across the face with a two-inch plank. The animal moved his head. I got my picture. The shopkeeper invited me to buy some holy beads.

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The picturesque turban of the Indian is regarded by most Occidentals as merely a headdress corresponding to the Western hat. The turban does serve to soften the power of the sun, but it has even more important duties, for by its color, shape, and the way it is wrapped, it announces the rank and profession of the wearer.

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In the early days of white settlement in India, no man was rebuked for extra-legal marital relations with a native woman; but now that has changed, and no European who desires to maintain social standing dare openly keep a native mistress; though he may, of course, marry a native woman without official stigma.

Eurasians in India call themselves Anglo-Indians. I have been told that they prefer to live apart, and that they are not contented, hating both the European, whom they ape, and the native, whom they pretend to despise.

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## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

A thousand times on this trip I have wished for you, Jim: in Japan where men pray to kindly Shinto gods and priests wear robes of brocade and satin; in China where gracious old men with thin beards tell the great wisdom of Confucius, and where, across the way, other old men tell of Lao-tse; in India where Brahmins discuss the Vedic gospels and Parsees speak of Zaratustra. In all parts of the Orient I have wished that you could talk with the yellow-robed followers of the Buddha, and see the Faithful kneel at sunset, touching prayer-rugs with their foreheads and acclaiming Allah the only God and Mohammed his prophet.

In Japan I met a young Japanese priest, no older than I, yet with learning born before man was born, and all one afternoon we talked, eating little sacramental cakes, colored green. In Peiping I came to know the wisest man I have ever known, an old, old man whose hands were thin and trembling, and who smiled, and who only asked questions. In Siam I spent a night, then another, with a priest, a fatherly old man of seventy, who talked in quiet tones of Guatama and of freedom won through self-analysis and good deeds. In Singapore I walked beneath the green lace of the palm trees and heard a venerable man talk of Allah, Lord of creation, the merciful, the compassionate. In India I have listened to ancient wisdom spoken by reverent lips.

All this wisdom, all this understanding, is confusing to me. It has upset me. I came to the Orient to see heathen: I have been told about them all my life. I

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

came to see barbarians and savages, Buddhists seeking self-extinction through inaction, and Mohammedans swinging the sword of Islam. Instead I find men of infinite learning, quiet philosophy, and a serene appreciation of the universe and its guiding forces.

In the Orient much rottenness is cloaked by religion. Millions of men are oppressed and rendered mentally sterile in the name of religion. Millions of men never see the evening star, because their eyes are ever lowered in prayer. In the name of religion, men mortify the flesh to enfranchise the spirit; they enfeeble themselves and become as useless as the stone idols whose poses they imitate. And in the name of religion, we of the Occident send men and women missionaries to teach that which we know, because we know, because our fathers knew before us.

At present in the Orient are three groups of missionaries: those who teach and practice medicine, those who teach Occidental science and Occidental literature, and those who teach the creeds of their individual churches.

In the East I have talked with kings and rickshaw boys, dancing girls and wives of American millionaires long resident in the Orient, and I have heard only praise for the medical missionary; he with his work is acclaimed by every one.

Missionaries who serve as teachers are not unanimously applauded. It is said that many of these missionaries teach dogma under the cloak of science, creed disguised as literature. It is said, too, that the native

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

goes to the mission school, picks up some or none of the facts taught there, takes unto himself some or none of the spirit of the place, then returns to his home and continues his life exactly after the manner of his fathers.

American residents in the Orient have told me that the spiritual missionary sent into the East is, in most cases, not so learned as the men who serve as priests and teachers in Oriental religions. They further say that missionaries live in a comfort and ease which their abilities could in no wise give them if they dared match themselves against American competition in America. And they greatly deplore the international complications that follow the advance of those super-fanatics who march out into uncivilized areas seeking the martyr's glory.

Many natives of the East are bitter in their resentment of America's invasion of their spiritual life. Many of them have traveled in America and have heard evangelists speak of the universal God in baseball slang, have attended revivals in the mountains of Tennessee. The speech of these Orientals is mingled with gall when they talk of missionaries coming from such sources to enlighten nations of timeless wisdom, "to save" nations of absolute spirituality. They insist that the chief success of the missionary is to cause the Oriental to hate the missionary, his country, and his God.

### XXXIII

THREE of us were drinking Cinzanos on the balcony of the hotel in Bombay.

"There's too much Angostura in this thing," complained Cynthia.

"Before long your London palate will become accustomed to the libations of the East," Ted declared. "Out here, a drink is merely a drink and not a sacrament; cocktails are not mixed with that touch of genius essential to true liquid benevolence; ports are poor, sherries are impossible, clarets—"

"Pardon"—Cynthia touched his arm—"who is that girl?"

"Gad!" Ted spoke softly, fervor in his lowered voice. "I never saw her before. Isn't she exquisite?"

"She is," Cynthia vowed. "Just what is she, Ted?"

"A Parsee." The girl crossed the room with an elderly man and a woman of middle age. "They're all Parsees," he said.

"And who, or what," Cynthia asked, "are Parsees?"

Ted told the waiter to serve more cocktails. He passed his cigarette case. "Parsees," he said, "are followers of Zarathustra who were chased out of Persia by the Mohammedan invasion of the seventh century. They came to India, wandered all over the

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

place, then settled in Bombay about three hundred years ago; they've been here ever since. You see a lot of them on the street, the men in those shiny black hats and the women wearing saris with borders of heavy gold."

The waiter brought our drinks. We lifted the glasses and nodded to each other.

"By the by," Ted said, "if you're interested in Parsees, I'll take you out to the Tower of Silence."

"What's that?"

"You tell her," Ted said.

"But I don't know either," I admitted.

"You haven't seen the Tower of Silence! Good Lord, man, I'll take you both there to-morrow."

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On top of Malabar Hill, the highest in Bombay, are five circular towers in a garden where palm trees rise from beds of brilliant flowers. All is silent, all is still, save that occasionally a fearful black shadow, made by a vulture, fat and well-fed, floats slowly over the ground.

"The towers have been standing for three centuries," explained the caretaker, as Cynthia and Ted and I walked in the garden on Malabar Hill. "No one ever enters them except two Parsees of low caste."

In a room he showed us a model, a little tower three feet high and two feet across, in the center of which was a hole, three tiers of uncovered metal grat-

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

ings, each shaped to receive a human body, encircling it and rising upward at a gradual slant.

"All the towers are exactly like this model," the caretaker explained. "The body is carried inside by the two low castes, undressed, and exposed in one of these gratings."

The caretaker bowed and went away. None of us spoke. We left the room quietly. Outside in the garden we saw, far down at the base of the hill, the sapphire sea, half-set in its semicircle of golden sand. And we saw those five great towers crowned by sleek vultures sitting in ghoulis circles, waiting.

Cynthia turned to Ted. "I can't stand it," she said.

"Buck up. After all, it's only a cemetery."

A shadow of a fat body with wings extended drifted across the grass at our feet.

"It's ghastly," Cynthia said, half aloud.

It was five o'clock. The sapphire sea crawled to the shore and cast its foamy lace upon the sand. The trees of Malabar Hill danced the saraband with the slow winds and whispered as they danced. Silently up the path came a procession of mourning men, their heads bowed, their hands limp beside them. Four men dressed in white bore the body, slowly, silently.

"But why, for God's sake, why do they do it?" Cynthia demanded.

"It's part of their religion," Ted said. "They worship the elements, earth, air, fire, and water; they could not defile the earth by burying a body, nor the

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

air by allowing it to decompose, nor fire by burning it, nor water by casting it into the sea."

"It's ghastly."

"Hush—they'll hear."

Slowly the procession mounted Malabar Hill. The women and the men wore the sacred shirt and the sacred girdle. They knocked upon the gate of the outer wall. The gatekeeper asked in ancient formula why they had come. "To dispose of our dead," they answered. The gatekeeper admitted them. And as the body was brought into the garden, the shadows upon the ground grew blacker.

Low caste Parsees took the burden from the men in white and carried it to a stone incline. Up this they went, the bier swaying to their steps. They opened the door of a tower and disappeared inside. They were gone for the time necessary to strip a human body of all clothing. Then the door opened and they came out. Behind them was a great rush of wings, a clacking of dreadful beaks.

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. . .

Three of us were drinking Clover Clubs on the balcony of the hotel in Bombay.

"It was horrible." Cynthia pushed her glass aside. "Horrible," she said.

"What becomes of the body afterward?" I asked. "What finally happens to it?"

"There isn't any body," Ted said. "Within thirty minutes after the birds begin, they have finished and

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

only a skeleton is left. Every eight days the low castes go into the tower, break up the bones and throw them into the central hole where the sun burns them into dust and the rain comes and washes the dust down to the sea."

"But, Ted, do all the Parsees, all of them, give their bodies to those birds?"

"All of them, absolutely every one must be—"

"Look," Cynthia interrupted. "Look," she said again.

Crossing the room was the Parsee girl we had seen the night before. I saw that her eyes were black, her lips red and full, her cheeks tinted like pale amber.

## XXXIV

GOOD-BY, *Matri-bhumi!* Good-by, Mother India! From the deck of this ship I say, good-by. Good-by, old mother—you veiled, you sinister, you dwelling in *purdah* among the nations, I say, good-by.

Good-by, Mother India, and good-by to a million golden phials brimming with perfume, and a million Standard Oil tins brimming with cow dung. Good-by to Hanuman, the Monkey God, and to Gandhi, the god in the making. Good-by to Ramayana and to Rabindranath Tagore. Good-by to brown women with eyes like doves and with temples like pieces of pomegranate, and good-by to the vultures that eat them. Good-by, Mother India.

I came to you at the end of my pilgrimage. I came to learn the wisdom of the Hitapodesa and the Rig-Veda. I came to learn the wisdom of Kalidasa, of Toru Dutt, and of Ramakrishna. I came for you to teach me. Instead, I, Occidental and conventional, I could not learn. I saw scorched entrails in your burning ghats, your baby girls big with child, and harlots in your temples: how could I learn?

And yet, old mother, I do not complain. The secret is yours. And yours it was before Hammurabi was



AN INDIAN WATER-CARRIER FILLING HIS GOAT-  
SKIN WHILE HIS GRANDDAUGHTER WAITS TO  
FILL HER BOWL



## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

born; before Queen Hatasu was carved in masculine attire it was yours. Guard it well, old mother. I am not jealous. I have learned that your secrets are not for me, not for men of my skin. And I know, too, that in the fullness of your time, after all the centuries of patient labor, you will bring forth the golden fruit; I know you will give my children's children to eat thereof.

So I leave you, Mother India. I leave you to the tasks that are yours, to tasks more arduous than those of Hercules, more disheartening than the trials of Thor in the palace of Utgard-Loki, more dangerous than the venture of Jason, son of Æson. And as the smallest whisper out of infinity, I wish you well.

And I wish *you* well, Great Britain. You who have built a golf course beside the Taj Mahal, and who play the sacred Jumna as a hazard. You who use India as a dumping ground for your excess in population and your excess in industrial production. You who deplore the white man's burden, and sell cotton goods at a profit. You whose statesmen talk of friendship, and whose soldiers grease machine guns: they keep them ready. You have done more for India than she has done for herself: you have given her a national discontent.

I wish you well, Great Britain. I wish your salesmen well in marketing your cotton cloth: I have heard your mills hum in Lancashire. I wish your soldiers well in keeping peace between Mussulman and Hindu. I wish your statesmen well in smoothing the ruffled

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

feathers of Garuda the half-man, the half-bird with golden body and wings of carmine, whose talons even now are being sharpened, whose beak drops molten fire.

I wish you well, Great Britain; I love you next to my own country; I wish you well. And I would that all other countries might learn from you. I would that when they go forth to plunder the brown man and the black man and the yellow man—I would that they might plunder with the gentlemanly grace that is yours. I would that they, too, might rear buildings such as you have reared at New Delhi. I would that they, too, might strive to serve as well as to rule. And so I wish you well, Great Britain; I love you next to my own country.

And I tell you both, good-by. Good-by, Mother India! Good-by, richest outpost of the Empire! From the deck of this ship I say good-by. From the deck of this ship I watch the slow roll of the waves. I watch them lave the purple shore line into the horizon. I watch the blue bosom of the water. I watch, and there is no shore line. I see a golden fog. India was there—India, richest outpost of the Empire, was there. And I say, good-by. Good-by, Mother India! Good-by, *Matri-bhumi!*

## XXXV

I AM sailing, my dear Mac, through the Suez Canal. We entered at ten o'clock this morning; we get out at eleven to-night. Most of the afternoon I've been on the upper deck enjoying cool breezes, heavenly after the hellish heat of the Red Sea.

I boarded this ship when she put in at Aden, a little town on the edge of the Arabian desert, where for no reason I went after I left India. There has been no rain in Aden for two years and I walked in sand, slept in sand, ate food gritty with it. In the town are only squatty little dwellings, helpless beneath the brutal sun; in one of them I lay all day half-naked under a punkah and tried to read. In the late afternoon I took my daily exercise: I mounted a camel and rode out into the desert, and, though I found no statue of Ozymandius, the lone and level sand stretched far away.

My only real pleasure in Aden was a friendship with three small boys I invited into a tavern one night to drink with me. After our first meeting, the boys frequently came to my room to smoke, and tell of raids on caravans, and amaze me by talking, small as they were, of beautiful women who fiercely worshiped strange gods of love.

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

The day I left Aden, my young friends came to the boat to say good-by. They gave me a farewell gift, a worn-out camel bridle. I assured them I would have great need for it in Birmingham, Alabama. . . .

Almost as soon as a western-bound ship leaves Aden, she heads into the Red Sea. On the first day there is no especial suffering, but on the second day one is definitely uncomfortable, and on the third that damnable wet heat wraps itself about the ship like a moist blanket. The night is torture. Men and women walk the deck in thinnest pajamas; some of them go forward and throw buckets of water on each other.

On the third day in the Red Sea our thermometer registered a high of one hundred and eight degrees. Thirty-six hours later the thermometer stood at fifty-two degrees. This tremendous drop is caused by the ship's passing from a sea area swept by hot winds from the Arabian desert into an area of cool breezes from the eastern end of the Mediterranean.

To celebrate the arrival in the cool area, a fancy-dress ball was given on board last night. It started gently enough; but as the evening waxed, all dignities and inhibitions waned. About midnight a Hindu holy man danced the Charleston with Mother Goose. A little later a student from Yale was caught throwing deck chairs overboard so that Pharaoh's army could sit down. And the party was finally ended by a very realistic little Salome chasing around the deck with a cricket bat, murderously pursuing an elderly John

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

the Baptist who repeatedly called out that he was really Marcus Aurelius.



There is a thrill, Mac, in the Suez Canal. A traveler may be a little tired of strange countries and famous sights, but his pulse is certain to quicken when he sees the canal and recalls the part played in history by this "ditch dug in sand."

The water of the canal is sapphire blue: a thread of blue on a cloth of gold. At times as I sat on deck this afternoon I saw other ships approaching. Whenever they came from around a curve in the canal, I could not see the water beneath them: they seemed to be sailing across the desert. There was something eerie about it, as if a painted ship had sailed into the wrong frame.

The canal is eighty-seven miles long and varies from seventy-five to one hundred and twenty-five yards in width. Its average depth is thirty-five feet. In it no ship can steam faster than eight miles an hour; the average passage is twelve to fifteen hours. I am going through on a royal mail ship flying the privilege flag, which means that all other ships must stand aside for us, and yet our passage from Port Twefik on the Red Sea to Port Said on the Mediterranean will require thirteen hours.

The canal is maintained by tolls. The charge is one dollar and eighty-eight cents for each net ton; two dollars and a half for each adult passenger, one

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

dollar and twenty-five cents for each child. The ship I am on is paying twenty thousand dollars.

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To-night I shall sleep in Port Said. To-morrow I shall take the train across the desert to Cairo, to the land of ancient kings. There I shall listen to the murmured mysteries of the ages, climb the Pyramids, dabble in the Nile, and play Œdipus to the haughty Sphinx.

## XXXVI

THE veranda of Shepherd's Hotel in Cairo is one of the world's most noted centers of travel. There one may sit in the morning and see men and women of all nations come for coffee. There I sat two mornings ago, my body aching from a day-break camel ride out into the desert to see the Pyramids and the Sphinx. In my pocket was a railway ticket to Luxor, "The Valley of the Kings," where I was going that night.

At the table next to mine sat a lanky individual whose speech was redolent of pine trees after they have been cut for turpentine, soft with the fragrance of honeysuckle wild on Southern mountains, and dreamful like the mocking bird singing in a water oak at midnight. "And then," the voice was saying, "I'm goin' to the Café de la Paix. I'm gonna hang my legs over a chair and call out, 'Garson, a bock.' Then I'm gonna sit there, and as the mamzelles go by I'm gonna wave at 'em and say, 'Jamais. Pas jamais.' "

His French was atrocious, but his ideas were attractive.

"When I get tired of that," he went on, "I'm goin' round to Prunière's and devastate a lobster. After that, I'm goin' to the races."

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

The veranda of Shepherd's slowly faded. The procession of the nations changed to that chic parade which is Paris.

"At night I'm gonna have dinner at the Red Donkey, out at the Place Blanche. There'll be a pigeon cooked with little green peas, there'll be dusty bottles, lots of 'em, and that violin fellow will come play beside my table. After that—"

"Excuse me," I said, leaning toward him, "but what boat are you sailing on, and when?"

"On the *Mauretania*, from Alexandria this afternoon."

"When is the last boat train from Cairo?"

"Ten forty-five this morning."

I looked at my watch. "That gives me twenty-eight minutes," I said.

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In my room I telephoned the steamship company. An Egyptian chambermaid and I packed. After my traveling bags were filled, there was a lot left over. I put what I could in my pockets and gave the rest to the chambermaid. With a sun helmet on my head, a cap and a hat in my hand, an overcoat over my arm, and neckties oozing from my pockets, I raced downstairs and dived into a taxi.

When the driver saw the five dollar bill, he grinned, rasped his gears, and crossed Cairo faster than Joseph fleeing Mrs. Potiphar. He ignored traffic signals, laughed at policemen, and apologized to me when he

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

rounded a corner on more than two wheels, leaning back and chatting over his shoulder as he drove sixty miles an hour.

Before the railway station he skidded around the arresting arm of a policeman, shrieked his brakes to a jerking halt, and bellowed for porters. He and two porters snatched my luggage and the four of us plunged for the train. As we neared it, it began to move. I jumped into a compartment, the porters threw my bags after me, and the taxi driver flung my victrola and a bundle of evening shirts on to the back platform.

I leaned out of the window and waved at them. Stout fellows, they were: I liked them. And suddenly I remembered. I reached into my pocket, drew out a long strip of green paper, and tossed it back to the taxi driver. "Have a good time," I shouted. It was the railway ticket to Luxor, "The Valley of the Kings."

I sat down and leaned back, slapped my hands and rubbed them, whistled a merry melody; my spirit blossomed like Aaron's rod, for I was on my way to Paris—suave, whimsical, glorious Paris.

. . .

And now that I am sailing through the straits of Messina, literally passing between Scylla and Charybdis, with Aetna fading into the blueness of the distance and Stromboli rearing himself from the waters ahead, I can't help wondering why I chucked it all and struck out for Paris. What about Luxor? What

## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

about the voyage up the Nile? What about Palestine and all the other trips I had planned?

And the answer comes clear and unmistakable: what about a pigeon with little green peas? What about that violin fellow playing beside my table in the Red Donkey? And the fat Madame at the little bar just above the Bal Tabarin, and Louis le Grand, and Louis le Petit, and old Monsieur de Cocques at his bookstall beside the Seine—what about them? And what about the Parisian memories that will come? Memories of hair black like strands of darkness spun on the wheel of Night, eyes like dew-wet violets murmuring prayers at morning, and a voice—I'll hurry to Madame Ninon's and drink little drinks in little glasses; they'll soften the hammering at the door of my heart.

Yet I didn't tip my hat to Egypt and race away merely because I wanted to see Paris; I did it because I'm tired of traveling; my impression valve is clogged. The other morning when I looked at the Pyramids and at the Sphinx, they seemed to me to be mere piles of stone and nothing more. When I visited the museum in Cairo I was blind to the marvels taken from the tomb of Tutankhamen. I then realized that too much travel had temporarily closed the vista of the ages to me; so I packed my grip and sailed away.

And I'm not sorry I did. At the present minute I have no desire to see the Valley of the Kings, nor anything else that is strange; but I am keenly looking forward to my arrival in Naples to-morrow. I'll stand on deck and watch the sun set far out beyond the bay,

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pouring its gold upon the houses of the old city as they rise tier upon tier, then, sullen and red, sink into the distant blue waters, while Vesuvius stands massive and broken, its eternal plume of white smoke slowly waving. And I'll go ashore and wander along streets I know, see men whose skin is colored like mine, whose speech isn't all darkness to my ears. I'll feel that I'm home again, and I'll be happy. I'll know, too, that my trip around the world is ended.

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And I'll ask myself: What of it? What of all this time I've spent wandering around the world, poking into strange places—what of it?

Perhaps the most notable result is that I have learned a great tolerance. The person who remains at home, who never looks over the rim of the mountain, is prone to believe that he and his friends live in the only manner God intended man to live; all other ways are certainly foolish, probably sinful. If a man's eyes are set in his skull at an angle, if he wears a kimono on the street, or eats with wooden sticks instead of silver tines, or calls upon Allah instead of God the Father, or shakes his own hand instead of yours, then, surely, he is a "foreigner," and, therefore, "queer"; to be recognized as an inferior, slightly distrusted, and denied full opportunity of living his own life after his own fashion. That he is unobtrusive and does not interfere with the privileges of others makes no difference—he is a foreigner.

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After a journey among strange people, one comes to know that externals cloak merely a mortal sameness: we all want the sun, and clean air, and healthy bodies, and companionship; some of us, the very, very young, want and expect to find even love; and that's as true in Tokyo as in Topeka, in Batavia as in Birmingham.

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Since I left America I have dealt in Japanese yen, Mexican dollars, Harbin, Peiping, Shanghai and Hong-kong dollars, the Cochin-China piaster, Siamese tical, Straits dollar, Dutch guilder, Indian roupee, Egyptian pound, Italian lira, French franc, English pound, and American dollar. I have learned not only the confusion of money, I have learned its power. In America, money buys a hat, or a fountain pen, or a pair of roller skates; in the Orient money has more subtle attributes.

The Orient is flooded with guides and pimps who cater especially to Americans. For money they offer anything from their countries' most sacred relics to their wives' most sacred favors. For two dollars I was sold a holy picture cut from a frame in a temple of Tibet. For three dollars I was taken by priests into Indian temples of monstrous passions. For ten dollars I could have bought the wife and two daughters of a gentleman who followed me along the streets of Rangoon.

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A palate of nice perception is an annoyance in the Orient. A person accustomed to dine quantitatively need worry only about the number of disease germs he is taking into his body, but one who has eaten Henri's *filets de sole à la Venitienne* and Jules' *vol-au-vent financière* desires more than mere food: he desires a perfect blending of all the sensuous delights. And in the Orient he can't get it, because the height of subtlety for the ordinary Oriental chef preparing a Western dinner is a thick steak served with boiled potatoes in cream.

Only the poorer European wines are shipped to the Orient, and they are withered by the long journey and the heat. Wines made in the Orient, rice wines and palm wines, possess none of the subtle glory of delicate clarets or fine burgundies. The favorite beer of the Orient is brewed there. One day I visited the brewery where it is made; I saw green scum at the edges of the vats.

Until the theories of Monsieur d'Astarac are proved practicable and cooking is done by alchemists in retorts and alembics, a traveler in the East must content himself with food that merely fills the body and in no wise delights the soul.

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The white man has built fine hospitals in almost every Eastern country, but he has been unable to scatter the millions of men in Oriental cities who live like pigs penned in a crowded sty; nor has he been able to

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drain swamps, nor interest natives in any sanitation except the most primitive. In the East, Death and his little brother, Disease, are only slightly hampered: swift and cruel, the pale horse and its rider ever hurry over the land; even a traveler sometimes hears the quick beating of ghostly hoofs.

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In Oriental countries I have seen woman roped in harness and tied to a cart. I have seen her, a mass of sores and rags, lie whining beside a dunghill, and lie there completely ignored. I have seen her take her place with ten thousand other women to await the nod of one man. I have seen her sold as we in America sell a walking stick or a plum pudding. And I wonder what I'll think when next I hear an American girl complaining because she has only twenty evening dresses, or an automobile with only six cylinders.

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Children in the East are so delightfully dignified. Even in their wildest play, as jolly as the play of children anywhere, they show a definite respect for each other and for themselves. They are not selfish in games or rude to elders. And I don't remember even one Oriental child who cried; certainly I never heard one whine.

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There are a thousand other things I remember when I think back over my Oriental Odyssey, but I can't tell them all. Besides, they will wait, they are in no hurry. They know that so long as I am, they are. They know that they are my thinking, my beliefs. And they are satisfied, for through them I have proved that all experience is an arch where through gleams that Untraveled World, whose margin fades forever and forever when I move.

## XXXVII

MY DEAR ROBERT TURNER: Just one year ago we sat together in your garden in Shanghai, listening to a Chinese boy sing his lonely soul through the strings of his fiddle. One year ago! To-night I sit in my home in Birmingham. I listen, and I hear the whistle of the Pan-American leaving the L. & N. station on its run to New Orleans.

I'm home again.

All that day in Shanghai we talked of little geisha girls, and looked at maps in old Atlases, and you played slow melodies on your clarinet. This morning I lectured at Birmingham-Southern College to little American girls who chewed Wrigley's Spearmint gum; who opened their vanities and powdered their noses. This afternoon I drove by Sloss furnace. I saw them making pig iron. I saw Negroes with knotty muscles carrying armfuls of pig iron. When I drove back to Twentieth Street I heard steam hammers staccato against steel girders. A new skyscraper is going up: we build 'em in ten months in Birmingham. A cop told me to drive on and stop gawking. "Can't you see you're blocking traffic?" he said.

I'm home again.

Three weeks ago at the Terminal Station I stepped

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off the Birmingham Special from New York. My friends were there to meet me. They said: "Hello! How's the boy?" They slapped me on the back and shook hands with me, hard. It was fine. The smoky air of Birmingham tasted good to my palate.

That night I went to dinner with my friends. As I dressed I was excited. I was back among my own people. They were waiting for me. I knew they were. They wanted to hear me tell of where I had been, what I had seen and done. I knew they did.

We sat down to dinner. My hostess asked about uncommon sights. "What was the most uncommon sight you saw?" she asked. I waited until every one quieted. It was my moment. I had dreamed of it while sailing through the Yellow Sea, while crawling through the Bat Cave of Bali. I sat a little more erect.

"Frankly," I said, "I hardly know. There were the white elephants of Siam, and the dancing snakes of India, and—"

"But you haven't seen any snakes," broke in a friend from across the table. "Billy Kincaid is the boy who has seen them. The other night at the club he saw pink ones and green ones."

"I'll say," Juliette Morgan agreed. "He was so far gone that he slipped and tore the straps off Kathleen's dress."

I heard how Billy Kincaid got lit, and how he flamed. Then I heard about the county golf championship. I

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heard how little Walter Gresham beat a field of veterans.

"He did it on the seventeenth. His approach was in that grass trap off to the right, lying low in that dip at the side next to the green; but he took his seven iron and chipped out dead, then dropped his putt. That finished everything—except the banquet that night."

"I don't suppose you've been to many banquets since you left," said our hostess.

"Not many," I admitted, "though I've been to some. There was one in Japan that was marvelous. Some little geisha girls taught me to play jankempo and—"

"To play what? Or can you tell?"

"Why didn't you play contract? It's a much better game."

"Do they play backgammon in the Orient? And how do you like it?"

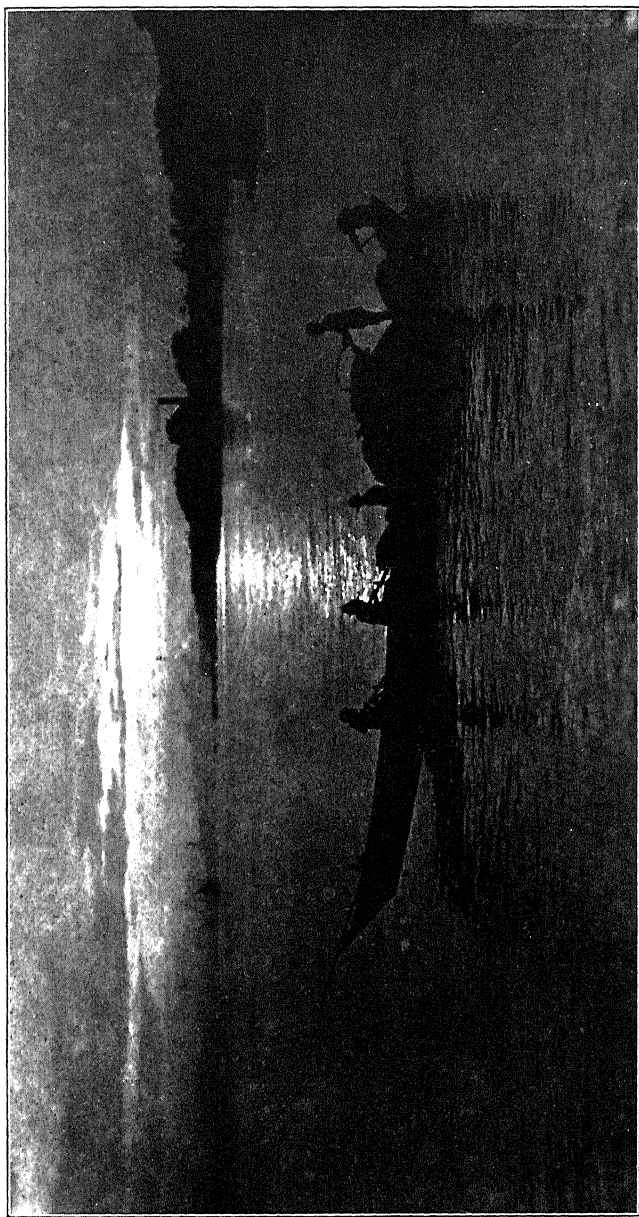
"I'm afraid I don't play," I said.

"You poor dear! Come along, I'll show you."

She led me into the library and taught me to play backgammon. We played for two hours. It's a good game. I enjoyed it. They put my name down for the tournament next week.

About eleven o'clock some one turned on the radio. We danced until midnight. Then we all told our hostess what a fine evening we had had. "Thank you so much," we said, and got into our automobiles and drove away.

I'm home again.



*"And tell me, do they still paddle long boats through the quiet waters?  
Do the boats slide like silk through the quiet waters on moon-drenched nights?"*



## FROM SIAM TO SUEZ

But tell me: does the moon like a white jade crescent still hang over Fujiyama, holy mountain? And tell me: do little girls of Korea still thrust tiny hands between bamboo rods and in shrill voices peddle themselves? And tell me: does the Great Wall of China still stand? Does Wu drag his rickshaw through the dusty hutungs of Peiping? Does he still call his deep-throated, "'Shaw, 'shaw"? Does the executioner at Canton still reap the heads of pirates with that American meat cleaver? Do the croupiers at Macao call four and four and four and four as they count the coins? And is there such a place as Angkor?

Tell me: does the father of Wongkit still moan his son? Are there ships in the harbor at Singapore? Do their riding-lights nod to the passing waves? And tell me: do the girls of Java weave temple flowers into their hair? And do the men of Bali play in the tropic night? Does the music sing itself like a god in love, yearn like a god in pain? And what of Matri-bhumi? Tell me, what of Matri-bhumi, old mother, veiled, sinister, dwelling in purdah among the nations?

Tell me these things. Tell them to me, Turner, else I'll forget they are. Even now I ask myself if they are, if they could have been; and I am not certain.

I am certain only that I must stop this letter and write a newspaper story about Alabama's cotton crop. To-morrow I must lecture at Birmingham-Southern College about Chaucer and Lyly and old Ben Jonson: I must teach the boys and girls of Alabama. And, Turner, I know that the cotton crop of Alabama is

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good, and that the boys and girls, the men and women, of Alabama are good. The cotton is the fleece of the fields of my fathers: the people are my people. It is fine once more to be among my own.

And so, good-night; I must write my newspaper story, I must get on with my job. Nobody will know when they read my story about Alabama's cotton crop that at times I left my typewriter, that once I went to the east window and looked out—and saw little yellow and brown women veiled in silks like woven air, heard the soft tinkle of camel bells.

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THE END















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